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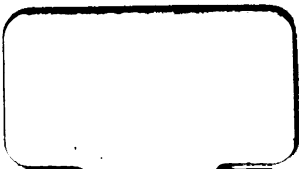


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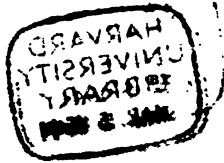
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1888





# DELPHINE.



97.211

MADAME DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN.

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*Un Homme doit savoir braver l'Opinion ! une Femme s'y soumettre.*

A Man ought to be able to brave public Opinion ; a Woman should submit to it.

*Madame Necker's Miscellanies.*

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CANCELLED

PHILADELPHIA:

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## PREFACE.

Of all literary productions, novels have to encounter the most general and extensive criticism. Almost every reader is entitled to pass his judgment on them; even those who are most modest and most diffident as to their understanding, have a right to consult their own feelings with respect to such works. The popular success, therefore, which ought to be aimed at in compositions of this kind, is one of its greatest difficulties.

Another difficulty no less important arises from the number of indifferent novels which daily issue from the press. The multitude of these productions induces the common observer to believe that the novel is, of all species of writing, the most easy, whereas it is precisely the numberless attempts made in this career which render every new essay more hazardous. In this, as in every other department of literature, the mind which is somewhat elevated dislikes the beaten path; and the importunate recollection of insipid productions, in which so much has been said about the affections of the heart, is a constant obstacle to the expression of genuine sentiment. Finally, this species of composition presents in itself difficulties which are sufficiently alarming, and which must be evident to all who reflect on the small number of novels that have attained the rank of eminent works.

Doubtless, a powerful imagination and a quick sensibility are requisite to enable an author to identify himself with all the various situations of life, and to preserve on all occasions that purity and simplicity of nature without which nothing can be great, beautiful, or durable. The concatenation of ideas may be subjected to invariable principles, of which it may always be possible to give an exact analysis. But sentiments are inspirations more or less happy, and these inspi-

rations are perhaps only granted to souls which have remained worthy of experiencing them. The example of some men of great talents whose conduct has been immoral will perhaps be urged against this opinion ; but I am firmly convinced that, on examining their history, if they have been hurried away by strong passions, they have been punished by the most bitter remorse. To have led an estimable life is not enough, for this task, but it is sufficient that the heart be not depraved.

A real terror would also prevail in society, were there not a language which affectation cannot imitate, and which no ingenuity can of itself call forth. This propriety of tone, if we may use the expression, ought to be particularly conspicuous in novels. Exaggerated sensibility, pride misplaced, the affectation of virtue, and all those formalities which so often fatigue us in real life, are to be met with in novels. As in observing the character of an individual, it may be said that by such a word, such a look, or such an accent, he discovered, unknown to himself, the extent of his understanding, or the feelings of his soul ; so in works of imagination, we may point out the situation in which the author has been deficient in true sensibility ; in what parts talent has not been able to make up for the want of character ; and where the mind has vainly sought what the heart would at once have suggested.

Events, in novels, should always be made subservient to the unfolding of the passions of the human heart ; probability, to a certain degree, must be preserved, that the illusion may not be destroyed ; but works which excite curiosity merely by the invention of incidents, captivate only men of that sort of imagination which authorizes the saying that the eyes are always children. The novels which we never cease to admire, as *Clarissa*, *Clementina*, *Tom Jones*, the *New Eloisa*, the *Sorrows of Werter*, &c., have for their object the exciting or recalling a multitude of sentiments which ought always to reside in the soul, and which form the happiness or misery of our existence. These sentiments we do not avow, because they are frequently connected with our secrets, or with our weaknesses, and because men pass all their lives with men, and mutually conceal their feelings.

History discloses to us only those striking features of human character which are rendered manifest by the force of circumstances; but it does not enable us to perceive the secret impressions which by influencing the will of some, decide the fate of all. The discoveries to be made in this science are inexhaustible. There is only one thing which is astonishing to the human mind, and that is itself.

“The proper study of mankind is man.”

All the resources of talent, all the developments of the mind are therefore to be sought for in the profound knowledge of the affections of the soul; and novels deserve to be esteemed only when they appear what we may call a sort of confession, snatched from those who have lived as well as from those who are to live.

In an examination of the human heart, we discover at each step the influence of moral character on our destiny. There is but one secret in life, and that is the good or the evil we have performed. This secret is concealed under a thousand deceitful forms. Your sufferings have been long, though you did not merit them. You have prospered long by unworthy means, but your lot in life is suddenly determined; the subject of your enigma is explained, and that was a secret which conscience had often told you long before the irresistible course of events proclaimed it. In this manner the history of man ought to be exhibited in novels; thus should fiction be employed to explain to us, by our virtues and our feelings, the mysteries of our fate.

Some will perhaps exclaim, “Nothing, indeed, can be more a fiction than a work on such a plan!” Do you still believe in those moral influences, in love, in the elevation of the soul, in a word, of all the illusions of that nature? In return, let me ask, if we discard this belief, what shall we put in its place? Shall we substitute corrupt and vulgar pleasures, a frigid heart, or baseness and perfidy of mind? This choice, hideous in itself, is seldom rewarded by happiness or success; but though both should for a moment be its result, that spectacle would only serve to inspire the virtuous man with a stronger sense of his own dignity. If history

represented generous sentiments as always prosperous, they would have ceased to be generous. The speculators would soon have appropriated them to themselves as the best means of succeeding in the world. But the uncertainty as to what may lead to splendour, and the certainty of that which morality requires, is an excellent opposition, which honours the performance of duty, and the voluntary preference of adversity.

It appears to me then that the circumstances of real life, fleeting as they are, cannot so well instruct us in durable truths, as fictions founded on those truths; and that the best lessons of delicacy or of dignity are to be found in novels, in which sentiments and characters are so naturally depicted, that on the perusal we fancy a real scene passes before us.

A common or a refined style are equally removed from this natural expression. Refinement is suited only to ornament, to those affections which we would not feel if we did not wish to display them. Refinement, indeed, is so evident a proof of coldness, that it excludes the possibility of any powerful emotion; but common expressions are as distant from truth as those which are studied, because ordinary language never paints what really passes in our hearts. Every man has a mode of feeling peculiar to himself, which would produce originality if he gave way to it. Talent perhaps consists only in the power of easily transporting the soul into all the affections which the imagination can excite. Genius will never speak better than nature, but it will speak like her even in invented situations; while the man of ordinary mind can feel only the impressions which arise from his own situation. Thus, in every species of composition, to paint with truth is of all things the most difficult, and the most simple, the most sublime and the most natural!

Ancient literature possessed no works of the kind we call novels. The country then absorbs all minds, and women did not enjoy so general an influence in society as to render it necessary for men to study all the delicate shades of love. The romances were much more indebted for their celebrity among the moderns to the marvellous nature of the adven-

tures, than to the truth and delicacy of the sentiments. Madame de Lafayette, in her *Princess of Cleves*, was the first who succeeded in uniting the painting of the brilliant manners of chivalry, with the touching language of impassioned affections. But the best novels are those of the eighteenth century! The English were the first who gave a moral object to these productions. They seek utility in every thing; a disposition which is peculiar to a free people. They require to be instructed rather than amused, because having to make a noble use of the faculties of the mind, they love to develope, and not to benumb them.

Another people no less remarkable for their enlightened views than the English are for their institutions, I mean the Germans, possess novels distinguished by their profound truth and exquisite sensibility; but an improper estimate is formed of German literature among us, or, to speak more properly, the small number of well informed persons who are acquainted with it, do not give themselves the trouble of replying to those who know it not. It is only since the time of Voltaire that justice has been done in France to the admirable literature of England. It will in the same manner be necessary for a man of genius to enrich himself with the fruitful originality of some German writers, to persuade the French that there are works in that language in which the ideas are profound, and the sentiments expressed with a new energy.

It is doubtless very proper that the authors of the present day should constantly remind us of the respect which is due to the master-pieces of French literature. It is thus we can only expect to acquire a good taste, a severe, and I would say an impartial criticism, if in our times the latter epithet be entitled to its true application in France. The great evils which our literature has now to dread, are sterility, coldness, and monotony. The study of the perfect and generally known works which we possess instructs us very completely as to what we ought to avoid, but inspires us with nothing new; while, by reading the productions of a people whose manner of thinking differs so much from that of the French, the mind is excited by new combinations, and the imagination is animated by the bold flights it con-



demus as much as by those it approves. In studying these works, our authors might succeed in adapting to the French taste, which is perhaps the purest in the world, some original beauties which would give to the literature of the nineteenth century a character entirely its own.

We imitate only the most perfect authors, and in imitation there is nothing illustrious; but writers whose irregular genius has not permitted them to polish all the riches they possess, may be happily explored by men of taste and talent; the ore of the mines can be rendered useful in all nations, but when coined it becomes proper to one only. We are not indebted for *Zaire* to *Phedre*, but to *Othello*. Though Racine derived great advantages from his intimate knowledge of Grecian literature, still much was left for his genius to perform. But would he have risen to such eminence had he only studied works which rendered, as his own now do, emulation hopeless, instead of encouraging it by opening to it a new field of exertion.

I am of opinion therefore that those national prejudices which induce the French to neglect the study of the authors of other countries, must present a great obstacle to their future success in the career of literature. But a still greater obstacle exists in the mode in which the progress of the human mind is proscribed under the name of philosophy. The fashion of the day, or the spirit of a party, constantly transports the calculations of the moment into the dominion of ages, and makes temporary considerations the ground of attacking eternal ideas. Were this system to prevail, the mind would no longer have the means of developing itself, it would be always confined to the fastidious circle of the same thoughts, the same combinations, and even the same phrases. Limited in its prospect of the future, it must be condemned to look back, at first with regret, afterwards with a sense of inferiority, and would doubtless remain stationary at a point far below the eminent rank attained by those writers of the eighteenth century, who are presented to it as models. The writers of that age were men of rare genius; they possessed the dignity of true talent; and they sought for and disclosed truths which were concealed by the clouds of their own times.

The love of liberty glowed in the old blood of Corneille. In Telemachus, Fenelon gave severe lessons to Lewis XIV. Bossuet summoned the sovereigns of the earth before the tribunal of Heaven, whose decrees he pronounced with a noble courage. But Pascal, the boldest of all, notwithstanding the horrid terrors which troubled his imagination, and abridged his life, has infused into his detached thoughts, the germs of a number of ideas which succeeding writers have developed. The great men of the age of Louis XIV. possessed therefore one of the principal requisites of genius, they outstripped the knowledge of their age; but it is not to be expected that we, whose views are constantly retrograde, can ever equal those who first occupied the walk to which we confine ourselves, and who, were they to arise again, would start from another point, and soon leave all their new contemporaries behind them.

It has been observed, that the influence of religious opinions has contributed greatly to the splendour of the literature of the eighteenth century, and that no work of imagination can arise to distinction where those opinions do not prevail. A work, which even its adversaries must admire for the uncommon, brilliant, and original imagination it displays, *le Genie du Christianisme*, has strongly supported this literary system. I have also endeavoured to point out the favourable changes which Christianity has introduced into literature; but as that religion has existed for eighteen centuries, and our best works have appeared only within the last two, I am fully convinced that some allowances ought to be made for the progress of the human mind in general, when we examine the difference between ancient and modern literature.

The grandeur in religious ideas, the belief of the existence of a God, and the immortality of the soul, and the union of those pleasing hopes with morality, are circumstances so inseparable from all elevation of sentiment, from all dignified and tender enthusiasm, that it seems to me impossible that any novel, any tragedy, or in short any work of imagination, could produce emotion without their influence. Considering, for a moment, then those sublime ideas

in their relation to literature only, it will appear that what is in different works called poetic inspiration, is almost always that presentiment of the heart, that transport of genius, which extends hope beyond the bounds of human destiny. Nothing, however, can be more hostile, both to the imagination and the judgment, than the dogmas of any particular sect. The mythology of the ancients was distinguished by its images, not by its dogmas. The obscure, abstracted, and metaphysical character of dogmas seems to present an invincible obstacle to their admission into works of imagination.

The beauty we perceive in some religious works, is the result of ideas which are understood by all men, and apply to all hearts, even to the hearts of the incredulous. Those who do not believe cannot refuse their regrets, though they may still remain without hope. Finally, the sublimity of religion consists in all those secret, vague, and indefinite ideas which surpass, but do not contradict, our reason.

It has for some time been endeavoured to establish a sort of opposition between the judgment and the imagination; and a number of men, to whom the finer efforts of the imagination are totally unknown, try to recommend themselves to notice, in the first instance, by throwing reason aside. We must, however, distinguish that kind of imagination which is one of the highest faculties of the mind, from that gross imagination of which all imperfect and passive beings are susceptible. The first is a talent, the last is a disease; the one sometimes anticipates the processes of reason, the other always opposes its progress. The former is acted on by enthusiasm, the latter by terror. I grant that, when it is wished to gain an ascendancy over weak minds, it may be desirable to inspire them with fears which reason would proscribe; but tales of hobgoblins are better calculated to produce that effect than the beauties of literary composition.

The imagination which shines in the master-pieces of literature, is intimately connected with the judgment: it demonstrates the necessity of soaring above the bounds of reality, but authorizes nothing in opposition to it. There always exists in the mind a confused idea of an excellence beyond every model, of something better, something greater,

than ourselves. This is what, in all works of genius, we denominate 'ideal beauty.' It is the object to which every soul, endowed with a portion of natural dignity, aspires; but whatever is contrary to our actual knowledge, to our positive ideas, displeases the imagination as much as the judgment.

I shall illustrate this by an example taken at hazard. It is derived from the incoherence of images, but it is easy to apply it to contradictory ideas. When Milton magnifies vice and virtue by the most striking pictures, we admire him; he enlarges our ideas, and fortifies our sentiments: but when he describes angels firing cannon in the heavens, he is deficient in that judgment which the nature of his subject requires. He departs from that consistency which ought to exist in fable as well as in truth; and the wound given to reason chills the imagination of the reader. In novels, in poetry, and in dramatic works, why do we condemn every thing which is not in harmony with recognised proportions, with the rules to which fiction is subject? It is precisely the admonitions of that same instinct, which disgust on observing an incongruity in the exercise of the reasoning faculty.

There resides within us a moral force which tends always to truth. By opposing sentiment, imagination, reason, and all the faculties of man, to each other, we should establish in human nature a division of powers, similar to that which, by weakening empires, facilitates their subjugation. These faculties have all the same direction, and one can ever succeed at the expense of the other. The writer, who, in the delirium of imagination, fancies he has subdued reason, will always find that it becomes his judge, not only in cool examinations, but in the impressions of the moment which enthusiasm decide.

I know not whether these reflections will be regarded as forming the apology or the censure of the correspondence I now publish. I certainly should not have given it to the world, had it not appeared consistent with the views and manner of thinking I have developed. The letters I have collected in these volumes were written at the commence-

ment of the Revolution. I have studied to retrench from them, as much as the connexion of the history would permit, every thing relating to the political events of the times. It will be obvious, however, that this was not done for the purpose of concealing opinions of which I think I ought rather to be proud; but it was my wish that the attention of the reader should be directed to the writers of the letters only. I believe it will be found, on perusal, that these letters contain sentiments which must for a time, at least, inspire only pleasing ideas.

This wish, I however, fear will not be accomplished. The greater part of the literary judgments pronounced in France will still for a long time be only the adulations of party, or the censures of prejudice. But the writers who, desirous of expressing what they conceive to be right and true, brave these anticipated criticisms, have chosen their public. They address themselves to the silent but enlightened portion of their countrymen; to posterity rather than to their contemporaries. They aspire perhaps also, in their ambition, to the independent and impartial judgment of foreigners; but they will doubtless recollect the advice which Virgil is made to give to Dante, when he is supposed to pass with him through the residence of the men of mediocrity, agitated as in life by hateful passions.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa,

\* \* \* \* \*

Non ragioniam di lor; ma guarda e passa.\*

\* The world has not preserved even the recollection of their names: take a passing look, but do not let us stop to speak to them.

## DELPHINE.

*Sunday July 1<sup>st</sup> 1815*

### LETTER I.

MADAME D'ARBEMAR TO MATILDA DE VERNON.

Bellerive, April 12, 1790.

NOTHING could give me so much happiness, my dear cousin, as to have it in my power to promote your marriage with M. de Mondeville. The ties of blood by which we are connected, give me the right of serving you, and I eagerly claim it. In case of my death, you would naturally succeed to the half of my fortune: shall it be refused to me during my life to dispose of a part of it in the same manner as the law would dispose of it after my death? At twenty-one it may appear ridiculous in me to offer an inheritance to you who are eighteen! I therefore speak to you of the rights of succession, merely to convince you that you ought not to consider a gift of the estate of Audelys as an embarrassing act on my part, or one at which your delicacy ought to be alarmed.

M. d'Albemar has left me so much wealth, that I should feel it a duty to share it with one of his family, even though that person had not been, like you, my companion for three years, nor the daughter of Madame de Vernon, of all the women in the world the one whose mind and manners attach and interest me the most. You know that Louisa d'Albemar, the sister of my husband, is my most intimate friend. She has confirmed with joy all the legacies which M. d'Albemar left me. Living in retirement in a convent at Montpellier, all her wishes are more than gratified by the fortune she possesses. I am then at liberty, perfectly at liberty, to secure to you 20,000 livres a year, and I do it with a sentiment of pleasure, of which you would not wish to deprive me.

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After giving you the estate of Audelys, I shall still leave 50,000 livres a year to myself. I am therefore almost ashamed to think that a transaction, which cannot in the least derange the habits of my life, should assume the appearance of generosity. It is habit only which renders fortune indispensable to our happiness. When we are not obliged to remove from us inferiors who rely on our bounty for their support, and when no remarkable change in our manner of living excites the affected pity of superiors, there can be nothing painful in a diminution of fortune. Besides, I do not think I shall fix my residence at Paris. During the year I have lived here, I have not formed a single connexion capable of making me forget any of the friends of my youth. The remembrance of these real friends is engraven on my heart with impressions so dear, and so sacred, that all the new acquaintances I make, scarce leave any traces by the side of these profound recollections. I love nobody here but your mother; without her, I should not have come to Paris, and I aspire to nothing more than to take her back with me to Languedoc. During the whole of my life, I have been accustomed to enjoy the sincere affection of my friends; but the praises bestowed on me here, leave at the bottom of my heart a sentiment of coldness and indifference which no pleasure arising from self-love can possibly alter. Notwithstanding any amusement I may find in the society of Paris, I shall soon withdraw myself from that tumult in which we always receive some wounds, the smart of which we feel in our retreat.

I enter into these details, my dear cousin, to convince you that I have much more fortune than is necessary for the kind of life I wish to lead. It is to be regretted that I am obliged to seek for all imaginable arguments to make you accept that which ought to be offered and received with equal ease; but the differences in character and opinion which possibly may exist between us, make me apprehensive of some obstacles to the plans which have been concerted by your mother and me. I am therefore anxious that you should be informed of every thing calculated to tranquillize you respecting this affair, to which you appear to attach by far too much importance. It involves in it no acknowledgment which can impose any restraint upon you. If all I have said should not suffice to convince you, I must repeat that my friendship for your mother is so ardent, and so sincere, that your being her daughter, would even though I did not know you, be a sufficient inducement for me to do every thing in my power for your advantage. But enough has been said about this trifling service; assuredly I should

not have dwelt on it so long, had I not perceived that you have a secret repugnance to the proposition I have made.

It is probable, also, that you are displeased with the conditions which Madame de Mondeville requires on your marriage with her son. But do not forget, my dear Matilda, that she knew you only during your infancy, since she has not left Spain these ten years; and remember, above all, that her son has never seen you. Madame de Mondeville loves your mother, and wishes to form an alliance with your family; but you know what importance she attaches to every thing that may add to the consideration of her own. She wishes her daughter-in-law to have a fortune, as a means of creating a still greater distance between her son and other men. She possesses generosity and elevation of mind, but she is also tinged with haughtiness and pride. Her manners may be said to be very simple, and her character very arrogant. Born in Spain, of a family attached to the ancient customs of that country, she had lived long in France with her husband, and there she has acquired the art of covering her defects with an amiable exterior, which produces the submission of all those that surround her. Every thing I hear of Leonor de Mondeville, persuades me that you will be perfectly happy with him; and I believe that Madame de Mondeville, notwithstanding the imperfections of her character, possesses a great ascendancy over her son. I have frequently observed that it is by our faults we govern those by whom we are beloved. We first wish to respect them, we fear to irritate them, and at last submit completely to their influence: while those qualities, the principal advantage of which is to render life easy and agreeable, are frequently overlooked, and give us no power over others.

These observations ought to have no tendency to dissuade you from so distinguished, and so advantageous a marriage; their object is to convince you that it is absolutely necessary to fulfil all the conditions required on the part of Madame de Mondeville. You must not enter into such a family with any inferiority whatever. When Madame de Mondeville is convinced that she has made a very suitable marriage for her son, the attentions you may bestow upon her will give her still greater pleasure. The more independent you are in fortune, the more agreeable will be every sacrifice which your sentiments or your duties may require.

Forget then, my dear Matilda, all the little altercations that have sometimes taken place between us, and let us unite our hearts by those affections which are common to us, and by the attachment which binds us both to your amiable mother.

DELPHINE D'ALBEMAR.



## LETTER II.

MATILDA DE VERNON TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, April 14, 1790.

SINCE it is your opinion, my dear cousin, that delicacy requires you should share the fortune M. d'Albemar has left you with his relations, I consent, under the authority of my mother, to the donation you propose; and I have reason to consider that conduct on your part as satisfying a great deal more than equity could demand, and giving you just claims to my gratitude. I engage then to perform every thing which religion and virtue can exact from a person who has voluntarily contracted the obligation which connects me to you.

My mother is desirous that the service you render me should remain a secret to all but ourselves: she supposes, that the pride of Mad. de Mondeville would be offended, were she to learn that her daughter owes her fortune to a gift. I tell you what my mother's opinion is; but I shall always be ready to make known what you have done for me, if you will permit me. Though the publicity of your benefits may humble me in the opinion of the world, it will raise me in my own: such is the spirit of the holy religion I profess.

I know that this sort of language has sometimes appeared ridiculous to you, and that, notwithstanding the sweetness of your disposition, a sweetness to which I shall always do justice, you have not concealed from me that you do not participate in my opinions relative to every thing connected with the observance of the catholic religion. I am really sorry for you, my dear cousin; and the closer you, by your excellent conduct, draw the bonds which attach us to each other, the more I wish it were possible for me to convince you that you take a wrong course, both for your own internal happiness, and for securing you the respect of the world.

Your opinions on every subject are singularly independent: you feel, and you feel justly, that you possess a mind of no common standard: but what is the advantage, my cousin, of such a mind in directing with prudence not only

women who were so fortunate as to please. For me to the contrary, I every where meet with the most flat She comiums. My situation enables me to perform such services to others, and never obliges me to ask any favour. The connexions I have formed with those who surround me are of my own choice. I desire none but with those whom I speak no ill of others, why then should any one be afflicted a being so inoffensive, and whose mind, if it be that the education I have received has given me that advantage, has, for its first object, to promote the happiness of those among whom I live?

You accuse me of not being so good a catholic as you are, and of paying too little regard to the arbitrary rules of society. In the first place, my dear cousin, far from blaming your devotion, have I not always respected it? I know it to be sincere; and though it has not yet entirely softened all the asperities of your character, I believe it contributes to your happiness; and I never would allow myself to attack it either by reasoning or by pleasantry. But I have received an education altogether different from yours. My respectable husband, on his return from the American war, commenced, in the calm retirement of a country life, the examination of all those great moral questions which the human mind is capable of investigating. He believed in God, he hoped that his soul was immortal, and virtue, founded on beneficence, was the worship he paid to the Supreme Being. Left an orphan in my infancy, I have acquired no other religious ideas except those in which M. d'Albemar instructed me; and, as on all occasions, he performed every duty of justice and generosity, I believe that his principles are sufficient for every heart.

I begin to believe that M. d'Albemar must have had little intercourse with men of the world. In estimating human actions, he only considered whether they were good in themselves, and never regarded the impression his conduct might produce upon others. If to think thus is to be a philosopher, I avow that I hope I may be allowed some claim to that title: but if by philosophy you understand the slightest indifference for the pure and delicate virtues of our sex—if you even understand by the term that force of character which makes us inaccessible to the sufferings of life, I certainly merit neither such censure nor such praise: you well know that I am but a woman with the qualities and faults which belong to that weak and dependent condition.

I am entering the world with a good and upright heart; with youth, fortune, and some understanding. Why should not these gifts of Providence render me happy? Why should

## DELPHINE.

myself for opinions that are not my own, or for which I am ignorant? The morality and the religion of the heart have served to support men who have pursued a far more difficult career than that which Providence assigned to me.

These guides will, therefore, be sufficient for the regulation of my conduct.

My dear cousin, permit me to tell you, that you have perhaps need of a more rigorous rule to repress a character which is less soft. But may we not love each other, notwithstanding this difference in our tastes and our opinions? You know how much I esteem your virtues, and that sentiment will afford me a lively pleasure in rendering your destiny happy; but, I beseech you, let each of us leave the other to seek in her own heart that support which is best suited to her character and her conscience. Imitate your mother, who never disputes with you, though your ideas and hers are often very different. We in common love one beneficent being, towards whom our souls are raised. This forms a sufficient relation of opinion. We are sufficiently connected by that bond which unites all sensible minds in the most exalted and most endearing of all sentiments.

In two days I shall return to Paris. I hope we shall then speak no more on the subject of our letters, and that you will grant me the happiness of being useful to you without interrupting it with reflections, which always give some displeasure, whatever efforts we may make to avoid being offended. I embrace you, my dear cousin, and assure you, that at the end of my letter I feel no trace of that painful disposition which dictated the first lines of it.

'DELPHINE D'ALBEMAR,

## LETTER IV.

DELPHINE D'ALBEMAR TO MADAME DE VERNON.

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Bellerive, April 16, 1790.

My dear aunt, my dear friend, why have you involved me in a correspondence with my cousin on an affair which ought to have been settled with yourself? You know Matilda and I are seldom of one mind, but that you and I always agree! When I have had it in my power to do you a service, you always accepted the devotion of my heart with the most noble frankness, and rewarded it with a sentiment which renders my life delightful. Why then is it not with you, with you alone that I have to adjust this business?

Can it be possible that I have displeased you by my reply to Matilda; that you no longer think me worthy of promoting the happiness of your daughter? No, you know the vivacity of my first emotions, and you will pardon them. This is to be expected from you, who always preserve that empire over yourself which tends still more to the happiness of your friends than to secure your own. I have nothing to fear from your generous and dignified character; you receive services as you would confer them, with simplicity. Satisfy me, however, before I see you. I know you do not love to write; but one word only is necessary to assure me that you will not withdraw the permission you have granted me.

I repeat it again; I know that you would not deeply afflict your friend. If you did I should be the first person in the world to whom you ever gave pain. But if I have done wrong, you know I shall be sufficiently punished by self-reproach, and I am sure you would not wish my error to be attended with consequences too painful. I expect a few lines from you, my dear Sophia, with an anxiety I never before experienced.

## LETTER V.

MADAME DE VERNON TO DELPHINE.

Paris, April 17.

MATILDA and you have acted like children ; this is not the way in which serious subjects ought to be managed. We shall talk over the business together, but never be uneasy, my dear Delphine, when what you desire depends upon

SOPHIA DE VERNON.

## LETTER VI.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, April 19.

A SLIGHT altercation, which arose a few days ago between Matilda and me, has vexed me, my dear sister. I send you copies of our letters, in order that you may be able to judge of what has passed : but how much do I wish you were near me. I endeavour incessantly to recollect every thing you have said to me. I once thought your excellent brother had, in our conversations, laid down rules of conduct which ought to guide me in every situation of life ; but I now find that I am troubled by inquietudes which are personal to myself, as if the general ideas I have acquired were not sufficient to enlighten me in particular cases. My destiny, however, is simple, and I never feel, I hope I never shall feel, any sentiment which may disturb it.

Mad. de Vernon, of whom you are not fond, though she loves you, Mad. de Vernon is certainly one of the most engaging, one of the most amiable, and one of the best in-

formed women I know ; yet I find it impossible for me to discuss my thoughts and sentiments fully with her. She takes no pleasure in a prolonged conversation ; and it is impossible to develope completely any opinion in discoursing with her, because her mind looks always straight forward to results, and seems to despise every other consideration. The immediate effects and consequences of actions seem to have been more her study than their morality or their influence on the disposition. Though she is a person endowed with most excellent qualities, yet she seems to regard success as every thing, and to put little value on the principles of human conduct. This turn of mind renders her a better judge of the events of life than of its secret anxieties. There remain therefore always some sentiments in my heart which I have not expressed to her, some feelings which I reserve as unnecessary to explain to her, but which I however feel to have a powerful influence over myself. My confidence in her is unbounded ; but I am naturally inclined, even without perceiving it, to speak to her only on topics that interest her. I always refer to another day my design of speaking to her on the subjects which engage my attention, but which have no analogy with her manner of thinking and feeling. My desire of pleasing her is mixed with a kind of uneasiness which makes me study how to render myself agreeable to her ; thus there is often more of coquetry than of confidence in our friendship.

But, my dear Louisa, to you I can lay my whole soul open ; you formed my heart while you supplied the want of a mother to me. You have been always my friend ; I still preserve in my intercourse with you all the pleasing confidence of early youth, of that age in which we fancy we have done every thing for those we love, when we communicate our thoughts and disclose to them our feelings.

Tell me then, my dear sister, what is the obstacle which prevents you from leaving your convent, and living at Paris with me ? Have you hitherto concealed your motives, and can you support the idea that there should be a secret between us ?

On parting with you I promised to write to you every evening an account of what happened to me. You say you wish to watch over my impressions. O yes ! you shall be my tutelary angel ; the virtues which you have inspired into my soul you shall continue to protect. But should we not be much happier were we together ? Can our letters even compensate for the loss of our conversations ?

After receiving Mad. de Vernon's note, I set out immediately to see her. I left Bellerive at five in the evening,

and was with her at eight. She was in her cabinet with her daughter. On my entrance she made a sign to Matilda to withdraw. I was pleased, and at the same time embarrassed, to find myself alone with her. I frequently find myself under a sort of restraint when with Mad. de Vernon, which continues until the sprightliness of her wit makes me forget the reserve and affectation of the first impression of her manners. I know not whether this is not a fault; but if it be, it serves to give more value to the demonstrations of her affection.

“Well,” said she to me, smiling, “Matilda, it seems, wished to convert you!”—“I cannot express to you, my dear aunt, replied I, “what pain your letter has given me! It provoked an answer, of which I soon repented. I am greatly afraid I have displeased you.”—“In truth, I have scarcely read it,” said Mad. de Vernon. I discovered in it your goodness of heart and your errors of understanding; in short, all that renders you a charming creature; I remarked nothing else. With respect to the affair itself, the lawyer who is drawing up the contract, will insert what conditions you please; but you must allow him to state that this gift is a compensation for your inheritance of M. d’Albemar’s fortune; for if Mad. de Mondeville should suppose that my daughter owes her dowry to your generosity, her pride will be so much offended, that she will break off the match.”

I confess I experienced a kind of repugnance at this proposition, and I was proceeding to resist it, when Mad. de Vernon interrupted me, and said, “M. de Mondeville knows not how proud we ought to be of receiving favours from such a friend. You have already rescued me from the ruin into which the perfidy of a merchant had nearly involved me;—you are now bringing about the marriage of my daughter, the only remaining object of my solicitude; yet such is the character of Mad. de Mondeville, that I shall be obliged to confine my feelings to my own breast, and to deprive myself of the pleasure I should receive from a public acknowledgment of my gratitude. If you require the service you would render me to be known, I must be compelled to refuse it, because it would then become useless to me.—But you will be satisfied, I know you will be satisfied, my dear Delphine, with the sentiment I experience;—with that sentiment which disposes me to receive every obligation from you, because there is none which my heart does not feel eager to return.”

These last words were pronounced with that enchanting grace which belongs only to Mad. de Vernon. She appeared to have no doubt of my consent, and to excite such an

idea would have been to chill all her feelings, which she so seldom allows to animate her, that I could not think of checking their impulse. The motives of my repugnance were pure; but I was ashamed to insist that my name should be proclaimed along with the gift I bestowed, and I was irresistibly impelled to yield to the request of Mad. de Vernon.

I said to her, however——“I have some regret in using M. d'Albemar's name in a transaction so opposite to his intentions; but could he see the respect you pay to his virtues, if he heard you speak of him as I do, perhaps \* \* \*.” “Doubtless,” said Mad. de Vernon, interrupting me, and this word ended our conversation on this subject.

A moment's silence followed; but, soon resuming her natural ease and gaiety, she addressed me thus:——“A-propos, must I send the Bishop of L. to confess you, as Matilda proposes?”——“I conjure you,” replied I, “tell me, my dear aunt, why you have given Matilda an education almost superstitious, and which is so little conformable to the vigour of your mind and the liberality of your opinions?” She instantly became serious, and said,——“This is a question you have often asked, and which I never wished to answer; but to you I owe all the secrets of my heart.

“You know,” continued she, “what I suffered with M. de Vernon, who, though a near relation of your husband, could not have resembled him less. His fortune and my poverty were the only motives of our marriage. I was long very unhappy. At last I became inured to M. de Vernon's defects, and succeeded in somewhat smoothing the roughness of his character. There is a way of managing every one, and women ought to find it out if they would live at peace in a world where Fate has decreed that they shall be entirely dependent on man. I could not, however, prevail on him to intrust me with the care of my daughter, whose education he superintended entirely himself. He died when she was eleven; having then an opportunity of paying attention to her myself, I observed that she possessed a singular harshness in her character, very little sensibility, and a mind more obstinate than comprehensive. I soon discovered that my instructions would not suffice to correct faults of such magnitude. I have much indolence in my disposition, a vice which naturally results from habits of submission. Though steady in my resolutions, there is too little authority in my manner of expressing myself. Besides, I view with too much indifference some of the interests of life, to be capable of assuming that serious character which is necessary in the education of youth. I judged myself as I



would have judged another, a task which you know is not very difficult for me, and at last I resolved to intrust my daughter to the care of the Bishop of L. After reflecting seriously on the subject, I was persuaded that religion, and a strict religion, was the only rein sufficiently strong to control the resolute spirit of Matilda. In a man this sort of temper would contribute to his advancement in life; but to women, who in all situations are condemned to yield, the advantages as well as the defects of a vigorous character can only prove sources of misfortune.

“My plan has succeeded. Religion, without entirely changing the disposition of my daughter, has removed some of its principal blemishes. As a sense of duty now influences all the resolutions she adopts, and even almost all the words she speaks, the natural defects of her character are only apparent in the coldness and aridity of her manners, but never produce any serious error. Her understanding, it is true, is very circumscribed; but, as she respects all the prejudices, and submits to all the rules of society, she will never be exposed to the censure of the world. Her beauty, which is perfect, will not involve her in any danger; for her virtue will always be supported by the unalterable austerity of her principles. She is disposed to make with equal ease the greatest and the smallest sacrifices; and the severity of her character makes her love restraint as much as another would delight in freedom.

“It would indeed be a subject of much regret, my dear Delphine, were a female, with your excellent understanding and amiable manners, to impose on herself a yoke which would deprive her of a thousand charms; but consider the character of my daughter, and you will find that the course I adopted was the only one which could protect her against all the evils with which she was threatened by her unfortunate resemblance to her father. To nobody except you, my dear Delphine, could I speak with so much confidence; but I could not permit the friend of my heart, who is about to secure the happiness of Matilda, to remain any longer ignorant of the motives which influenced me in one of the most important resolutions of my life, in that which related to the education of my child.”

“You never can speak,” my dear aunt, without convincing,” replied I; “But, after all, why could you not have instructed your daughter yourself? Are not all your opinions conformable to reason——.”—“Oh! my opinions!” said she, smiling and interrupting me: “nobody knows what are my opinions; and as they have no influence on my sentiments, there is no necessity for your knowing them,

my dear Delphine."—In concluding these words, she rose, took me by the hand, and led me into the saloon, where several persons were assembled.

On entering, she apologized for her absence with that inimitable grace which even you must acknowledge her to possess. Though she is at least forty, she still appears charming even among the young and beautiful of her own sex. The paleness of her complexion, the slight relaxation of her features, indicate the languor of indisposition, and not the decay of years; the easy negligence of her dress accords with this impression. Every one concludes, that when her health is recovered, and she dresses with more care, she must be completely beautiful; this change, however, never happens, but it is always expected; and that is sufficient to make the imagination still add something more to the natural effect of her charms.

In one corner of the room sat Mad. du Marset. I do not recollect whether I have told you that this lady has taken a dislike to me, though I never gave, and never wished to give her the smallest offence.

Ever since my arrival she has thought proper to testify her disapprobation of the kindness shown me, as if she considered it a personal affront to herself; for sometimes I tried to conciliate her; but when I found she had formed a sort of public engagement to detest me, and that, incapable of procuring herself enjoyment by her friendships, she sought it in her hatreds, I resolved to despise all that is factitious as well as all that is real in her aversion to me. She pretends she cannot tell why to accuse me of loving and too much approving the revolution of France. I let her prate on. Fifty years of age, and a bad temper, are sources of vexation which may excuse a good deal of ill humour.

Beside her was M. de Fierville, who, notwithstanding her advanced age, is her faithful adorer. He has more wit but less character than his mistress, and this accounts for her completely governing him. He sometimes chooses to converse with me; but as, out of compliment to Mad. du Marset, he frequently censures me when I am absent, he always takes care to make some reservation in the compliments he pays me, in order that he may appear somewhat consistent. He is occupied with his own petty anxieties; to them I leave him; for I love nothing about him but his wit, and that he cannot prevent me from enjoying when he speaks to me.

In the midst of company Matilda never once thinks of amusing herself. The most indifferent actions of her life

are always with her the performance of a duty. She places herself beside the least amiable persons, arranges every thing, prepares tea, rings for the servant to mend the fire, and is as busy in the parlour as if she were managing the affairs of a kitchen; as to conversation, she never suffers herself to be for a moment so engaged in it as to divert her from her course. This constant habit of obliging would merit admiration, if it occasioned any sacrifice of her own inclinations; but she really takes a pleasure in this sort of methodical existence, and blames in her heart those who do not imitate her.

Mad. de Vernon is too fond of gaming. Though she might distinguish herself in conversation she avoids it, and it would seem that she wishes neither to develop her feelings or thoughts; but her taste for play, and too great a prodigality in her expenses, are the only serious faults I observe in her. She chose for her party last night Mad. du Marset and M. de Fierville; I slightly reproached her, because I had heard her at different times say a good deal to the prejudice of both of them. "Praise or blame," replied she, "is an amusement of the mind, but to live in society, management and civility are necessary."—"To esteem and despise," I remarked, with warmth, "is an emotion which the soul must experience; it is a necessary lesson; an example which it is woful to give."—"You are right," said she, hastily, "you are right, in a moral view; but what I said was only in allusion to the interests of the world."—She then pressed my hand, and left me with an expression perfectly amiable.

I stopped beside the fire to discourse with some gentlemen, whose conversation, particularly at the present moment, inspires the most lively interest in all minds capable of enthusiasm and reflection. I sometimes reproach myself with mixing too freely in this interesting conversation. There is perhaps some violation of propriety in my thus taking a part in discussions of the greatest importance. But when Mad. de Vernon and her female friends sit down to cards, I find myself almost alone with Matilda, who never speaks a word; and the attentions which are always shown me by the most distinguished men of the company induce me to listen to them, and join in their conversation.

However, it is perhaps true, that I often follow, with too much warmth, the impulse of my own sentiments: I do not sufficiently avoid the distinctions I obtain in company, though they may sometimes excite the displeasure of other ladies. How much do I want a guide! Why am I alone! I finish this letter, my dear sister, with a repetition of my

request.—Come to me; do not abandon your Delphine in a world so new to her. It inspires me with a sort of indefinite fear, which all the pleasures I experience never dissipate.

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## LETTER VII.

MISS D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, April 25, 1790.

*My Dear Delphine,*

I AM sorry you have been so generous to these Vernons. My brother liked the daughter better than the mother, though the latter is much more agreeable than the former. He believed Mad. de Vernon deceitful, perfidiously deceitful. Pardon me the use of these words: I know not how else to express their full force, and I trust in your kind friendship for my excuse.

My brother was of opinion, that Mad. de Vernon was destitute of principles and affection; that she interested herself in nothing except in promoting the success of herself and family in all the affairs of the world; and that wealth and aggrandizement were the great objects of her life. I know that she endured with exemplary mildness a painful connexion with the most odious of husbands; that, though beautiful, she had no intrigues, and that slander has not had a word to say in that respect against her: but though you should believe me unjust, I must confess to you that it is precisely this regularity of conduct which appears to me inconsistent with the levity of her principles, and the indifference of her character. Why should she comply with every duty, while she appears to attach no importance to any? Notwithstanding the motives she assigns for the education of her daughter, must she not be greatly wanting in sensibility, since she herself has neglected to form, according to her own character, the person most dear to her; since she has not thought it necessary to infuse into her a portion of her own soul, but has rendered her a stranger to herself, in consequence of opinions which exercise the most powerful influence over the whole of life.

Perhaps I may be wrong in judging thus unfavourably of a person to whom I can impute no blameable action; but her physiognomy, agreeable as it is, would be sufficient to prevent me from placing any confidence in her. I am firmly convinced that the habitual sentiments of the soul leave remarkable traces on the countenance: thanks to that index of nature; there is no complete dissimulation in the world.— You know I am not distrustful, but I observe; and though I may be deceived with respect to facts, I am seldom mistaken as to characters. This is sufficient to prevent me from misplacing my affections; and it is of little importance to me what may become of my other interests.

As to you, my dear Delphine, you allow yourself to be seduced by the charms of wit, and I fear much, that if you give your heart to this woman, she will make you suffer most cruelly. Do her a service when you please. I am not particular as to the qualities of the persons we may oblige; but we intrust to those we love whatever is most delicate in happiness, and I alone, my dear Delphine, love you sufficiently to wish always to share your deep and lively sensibility. To rescue you from the seductions of this woman, I should wish to go to Paris; but I cannot find resolution to commence the journey. It is absolutely impossible for me to conquer the repugnance I feel to quitting my solitude.

I must at last explain to you the cause of this repugnance. I shall now endeavour to describe it to you in writing, though I never could have prevailed on myself to state it to you in conversation: but I earnestly beg of you to return no answer to this part of my letter, for the subject is too painful for me to discuss. You know that my person is one of the least agreeable in the world; my shape is awkward, and my figure destitute of every sort of grace. I never would marry, though my fortune attracted a number of suitors: I have lived almost alone, and should be a bad guide for myself, as well as others, in the midst of the passions of life; but I knew enough to have long since discovered that a woman, whose appearance is disagreeable, must be the most unhappy of mortals if she live not in retirement. Society is so arranged, that, during the first twenty years of her life, she is neglected as a person in whom no other of her species can feel a lively interest. She is constantly humiliated without any one intending it, and scarce any conversation can occur in her presence which does not awaken in her soul some painful sensations.

I might, it is true, have enjoyed the happiness of being a mother; but what must have been my feelings, had I trans-

mitted to my daughter the disadvantages of my figure! had I beheld her destined, like me, never to know the supreme happiness of being the first object of attachment to a man of sensibility! I would not intrust the secrets of my heart to any but you, my dear Delphine; but though I am not formed to inspire love, it does not follow that my heart should be devoid of the most tender affections. I felt almost in infancy, that with my figure it would be absurd to fall in love. You can have no idea of the tormenting sentiments that have agitated me! It was absurd for me to fall in love! yet nature never had formed a heart to which that happiness was more necessary.

A man with the most striking exterior defects may still preserve the hope of rendering himself happy. Many have ennobled with laurels the deformities of nature; but women have no existence except in love; the history of their life begins and ends with love! How are they to inspire that sentiment, if they possess none of those graces which are calculated to please the eye! Society in this respect augments those evils, which have their origin in nature, instead of modifying their effects. The unhappy female, whom love and maternal affection can never bless, is rejected by the world. How exquisite must be the secret torments of her heart!

I have been as romantic as if I resembled you, my dear Delphine; but I have always been too proud not to conceal from all eyes the unfortunate contrast of my destiny and my character. How then have I succeeded in supporting the past years of my life? I buried myself in retirement, centring in you all my interests, all my wishes, and all my feelings. I said to myself, that I would have been you, had nature granted to me your graces and your charms; and seconding with all my soul the inclination of my brother, I conjured him to leave to you the portion of his property he intended for me.

What should I have done with riches? I have enough to render those that depend upon me happy, and to comfort the unfortunate who surround me; but what use could I make of money, which would not add to the painful sentiment that weighs down my soul! Would I have employed it in embellishing my house for myself, my gardens for myself? Alas! the gratitude of no beloved companion would ever have rewarded my care! Could I have made myself happy by entertaining numerous companies, whose conversation would most frequently have turned on what others possess, but which I want! Would I have been wise to expose myself to the hazard of propositions of marriage which might have been addressed to my fortune; or ought I to have condemned

myself to encounter all the deceptions which interested men might have practised to flatter my vanity, and to deprive me at last of my own esteem?

No—no, Delphine, my prudent resignation is the better course. There remained to me only one happiness for which I could hope: I have obtained it; I have adopted you for my daughter. Shut out from the world myself, it was my wish to procure you all the means of enjoying it. To be near you, to see you, to hear you, would doubtless delight me; but with you are the pleasures and splendours of that society in which you deserve to mix. My heart, which has never known the passion of love, is still too young not to feel pain in being cut off from all the delights of society, in a place where every object would constantly renew that sensation.

The pains of the imagination depend almost entirely on circumstances reviving them in the mind. They vanish of themselves when we neither hear nor see any thing calculated to bring them to our recollection; but their influence is most terrible when the mind is, at every moment, compelled to struggle against new impressions. We ought to be able to divert our attention from importunate feelings, and to withdraw from them with address; for it is necessary to use address with ourselves, if we would avoid tortures too great to be endured. I cannot pretend to estimate the character of others, my dear Delphine, but I pretty well know myself; for that knowledge is the fruit of solitude.

With considerable difficulty I have succeeded in tracing out for myself a course of life which preserves me from any pungent griefs. Every hour has its occupations, though there is nothing which fills up my entire existence. I add one day to another, and this makes up, first one year, then two, and ultimately the whole of life. I dare not attempt to change my position, nor to unsettle either my condition or my mind. I dread lest I should lose the result of my reflections, and disturb those habits which are still more necessary to me, since they enable me to dispense even with reflection itself, and to pass my time without thinking of it.

Already will this letter have the effect of disturbing my repose for several days. I must not be tempted to speak, scarcely even to think, of myself. I live in *you*—Allow me to follow you with my prayers, and to aid you with my advice, if I can presume to give you any as to the affairs of this world, of which I profess my ignorance. Apprize me, successively and regularly, of the wants in which you are interested. In your history I shall almost think that I have lived: I shall retain some remembrances; and through you

I shall enjoy sentiments which, of myself, I could neither feel nor inspire.

Would you think, that I am almost sorry that you have married Matilda to Leonce de Mondeville. I am told he is so handsome, so amiable, and so high-spirited, that I think him worthy of my Delphine. But I hope she will find the man who is to render her happy; then, and not till then, shall I enjoy real tranquillity. Whatever distinction you may possess, what could you do without a protector? You would excite envy, and it would persecute you. Your mind, however superior, can do nothing in its own defence. Nature has decreed, that all the endowments of women should be subservient to the happiness of others, and of little utility to themselves.

Adieu, my dear Delphine, I thank you for keeping up the habit of your infancy, in writing to me, every evening, what you have been employed in during the day. We will peruse, together, the secrets of your mind, and, between us we shall, perhaps, have sufficient energy to secure your happiness.

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## LETTER VIII.

### ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO MISS D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 1.

WHY, my dear sister, have you forbidden me to answer you, with regard to the motives which keep you at a distance from Paris? How many reflections has your letter suggested, which I would wish to express! Ah! I shall soon set out to rejoin you, and to pass with you all the remaining years of my life. Believe me, this life of youth and love is not so happy as you imagine. My mind, for these several days, has been exclusively occupied with the fate of one of my friends Mad. d'Ervins. Her beauty, and the sentiments which it inspires, have been the only source of her errors and her troubles.

You know, that when I left you, about a year ago, I was taken dangerously ill at Bourdeaux. Mad. d'Ervins, who resided in the vicinity of that city, had come to spend a few days there, during her husband's absence. On learning my name and situation, she, with ineffable goodness, came to lodge in the same house with me, in order to take care of



me. She watched by me, during a fortnight, and I am convinced, that it is to her I owe my life. Her presence calmed the perturbations of my frame, and when, at any time the fear of death occurred, a single look upon her lovely form was sufficient to make it give way to more soothing presages. When I began to recover, I was desirous to know the person who had already merited my entire friendship. I was informed that she was a native of Italy, and that her family resided at Avignon. At fourteen years of age she had been married to M. d'Ervin, who was five and twenty years older, and who had, for ten years, confined her abode to one of the most gloomy seats in the creation.

Theresa d'Ervin is the most captivating beauty I have ever beheld. An expression, at once *naïve* and impassioned, sheds over the whole of her person an indescribable charm of love and innocence which is singularly attractive. She has not received the benefit of instruction; but her manners are dignified, and her language correct. Like the rest of the Italian ladies, she is devout and superstitious; but, though frequently engaged in the offices of religion, she has never, seriously, reflected upon the subject of morality. Her disposition, however, is so perfectly good and susceptible, that in none of the duties of life would she have been found deficient, had she been united to a man worthy of her love. The natural qualities of the heart are sufficient to preserve the purity of the person who is happily circumstanced; but when you are condemned, from chance, or society, to struggle against your disposition, principles, which are the offspring of reflection, then become necessary in order to protect you against yourself; and the most amiable characters in the habitual relations of life, are those which are the most exposed to danger, when virtue has to enter the lists with sensibility.

The features and manners of Theresa have so youthful an air, that one could scarcely suppose she was already the mother of a daughter nine years old. From this daughter she is never for a moment absent, and the extreme tenderness which she shows her, astonishes the poor child, which seems to evince a vague idea of gratitude for protection, rather than that of a more exalted sentiment. Her infantile mind is surprised at the emotions which she excites; a rational affection and useful precepts would perhaps make a deeper impression.

For ten years, Mad. d'Ervin lived tolerably happy with her husband. Solitude and a regulated education prolonged her infancy; but it was to be feared the world would prove injurious to her repose; and, unfortunately, I was the first

cause of the time which she passed at Bourdeaux, and the occasion that occurred of introducing her to the acquaintance of M. de Serbellane, a Tuscan, about thirty years of age, who had left Italy three months before, and had been led to visit France in consequence of the Revolution. A friend to liberty, he wished to fix his abode in a country which was fighting for it. He came to see me, in consequence of former connexions between our families. I set off a few days after; but I, already had some reason to fear that he had made a deep impression on the heart of Theresa. In the course of the last six months, she repeatedly wrote to me that she was uneasy, that she was unhappy, but without explaining the cause of her affliction. M. de Serbellane arrived, a few days ago, in Paris, and immediately waited upon me; but not finding me at home, he left a letter for me from Theresa, which contains the whole of her story.

About six months after my departure, M. de Serbellane had been instrumental in saving her husband and herself from the dangers to which they were exposed from the hatred entertained by the peasantry against M. d'Ervin. The courage, coolness, and firmness evinced, on that occasion, by M. de Serbellane, made an impression upon the lofty vanity of M. d'Ervin, who begged he would make his house his home. There he resided for six months, during which time Theresa could not resist the sentiments of affection which he excited in her bosom. Remorse soon took possession of her mind, and, without abating the violence of her passion, served only to multiply her dangers, and to betray her secret. Her safety was equally endangered by her love, and the self-reproaches with which it was accompanied. M. de Serbellane was apprehensive lest M. d'Ervin should perceive the partiality of his wife, and lest the same vanity which now served to blind him, should be inflamed to madness, if he ever came to discover the truth. Theresa herself was anxious for the departure of her lover; but the moment he set off, her regret became so excessive, that I am in daily dread of her soliciting her husband to conduct her to Paris.

It is necessary that I should give a description of M. de Serbellane, before you can conceive how, with so much judgment and even coolness in his affections, he has been able to inspire Theresa with so ardent an attachment. In the first place, I think it will be generally found, that a man of a cold temperament easily conciliates the affections of a heart susceptible of passion. He captivates you, and sustains your interest, by making you suppose a secret beyond what he expresses; and even his defect of ardour, for

a time at least, still more excites the anxiety and sensibility of a female. Connexions thus formed are, perhaps, not the happiest, nor the most durable; but they more powerfully agitate the heart which is weak enough to indulge them.

Theresa, solitary, romantic, and unhappy, was so hurried away by her own feelings, that M. de Serbellane cannot be accused of having seduced her. His countenance is engaging and dignified; his features have the expression common to the natives of the south of Europe, while, from his manner, he might be taken for an Englishman. There is something very striking in the contrast which his animated figure makes with his calm accent, and the uniform circumspection of his deportment. His mind is grave and energetic. His principal fault, in my estimation, is that he never sufficiently familiarizes even those to whom he is most attached. He has so complete a command of himself, that there must always be felt a sort of inequality in one's intercourse with a man, who, during the whole of the day, does not utter a single involuntary expression. This reserve must not, however, be imputed to any sentiment of dissimulation or distrust, but to his constant habit of commanding himself, and of observing others.

A large fund of good nature, and a secret disposition to melancholy, excite the confidence of those who are attached to him, and create a desire to merit his esteem. A refined and delicate choice of words gives an occasional insight into his character. He seems to perceive, and even secretly to participate in the sensibility of others, and, in the recesses of his heart, to make a return to the emotion which is expressed towards him. But all that he feels in this way appears as behind a cloud, and in his company persons of a lively imagination are neither totally discouraged, nor entirely satisfied.

A man of this description must have necessarily acquired an extensive influence over Theresa; but from this she derives no increase of happiness, as to all her other troubles is to be added the continual alarm of losing even the esteem of her lover. Distracted by the most opposite sentiments, by the remorse of having loved, and the fear of not being sufficiently loved in return, her letters describe her as in such a state of agitation, that every thing is to be dreaded from a conflict too violent for her mind and her reason.

In the evening of the same day on which I received Theresa's letter, I met M. de Serbellane at Mad. Vernesis'. I went up to him, and said I wished to speak with him. He rose from his chair, and with his wonted expression of calmness, followed me into the garden. I told him, without entering

into any detail, that I had been informed by Mad. d'Ervin's of every thing which interested her, but that I shuddered at her project of coming to Paris.—“It is impossible,” continued I, “with the disposition which you know Theresa to possess, that her tenderness for you should not be speedily discovered by the idle penetrating observers of this country. M. d'Ervin's will learn his own wrongs from treacherous pleasantries, and the wound which they will inflict on his pride, will be much more terrible. Write, therefore, to Mad. d'Ervin's; it is for you to dissuade her from her designs.”—“Madam,” replied M. de Serbellane, “should I write to entreat her not to meet me again, she would see nothing in that conduct but an abatement of my tenderness for her; and the pain which I should thus occasion would be the severest of all. Does it become me, who am guilty of having seduced her, now to assume the language of friendship in order to direct her? I should shock her heart, I should afflict her, and my conduct would not be truly delicate, for there is no delicacy but in perfect goodness.”—“But,” said I, “you notwithstanding display, in all circumstances, such strength of reason.”—“Sometimes,” interrupted M. de Serbellane, “I do so, when I myself only am concerned; but I think there is a sort of barbarity in applying the principles of reason to the sorrows of others, and, upon such occasions, I never have recourse to it.”—“How then,” said I, “will you proceed, should Mad. d'Ervin's actually come to town, ruin herself, and be abandoned by her husband?”—“It is my wish, madam,” replied M. de Serbellane, “that Theresa should not come to Paris. I should consent to the painful sacrifice of seeing her no more, were that necessary to her repose; but should she arrive here, and a breach take place between her and her husband, I will devote my life to her interests, and on the supposition that the laws of France admit of divorce, I will marry her.”—“Is that your determination,” exclaimed I,—“marry her who is a catholic and a devotee?”—“I only inform you,” calmly resumed M. de Serbellane, “of what I am ready to do for her, should her happiness require it; but it is much better that both of us should remain as we are; and I hope that you will prevail with her not to come.”—“Permit me, sir,” rejoined I, “to remark that your conversation displays a singular mixture of passion and coldness.”

“You have delivered your opinion, madam,” replied M. de Serbellane, “a little too hastily, that coldness forms any part of my character. From my infancy, timidity and pride, conjoined, have given me the habit of repressing the external signs of my emotions. Without detaining you too long with an account of myself, I will tell you, that, like most young

men, I committed many faults on my entrance into the world ; that these faults have, from a combination of circumstances, been attended with fatal consequences, and that in all the sorrows which I have experienced, I have retained a sufficient degree of tranquillity as to my own impressions ; but a profound interest in the destiny of those who are, in any respect, dependent upon me. The impetuous passions always have for their object personal gratification. These passions have lost much of their power over my heart ; but I am not callous to my duties ; and I can do nothing better than to avoid giving pain to those who love me, now that I can no longer have any lively relish for the pleasures of life, nor any ardent desire directed exclusively to my own happiness."

In uttering these words there was an expression of melancholy depicted in the countenance of M. de Serbellane.

I felt for him that kind of sentiment which is excited in us by the misfortunes of a man of superior character. I grasped his hand as I would that of a brother ; he conceived all that I felt, and thanked me ; but his heart soon after closed : I thought I could even discern, that he was afraid of being led to talk much more of himself ; and I followed him into the saloon, to which he returned of his own accord. I have seen him twice since this conversation ; but he always avoided talking to me when alone ; and there is a coldness in his manner which renders familiarity impossible. Yet he regards me with more interest, addresses himself to me in a general conversation, and I am inclined to think that he wishes to intimate, that the person to whom he has even once opened his heart, will ever be distinguished by him from the rest of the world. But, alas ! my friend cannot, will not, be happy, and her bosom will continue to be torn at once by love and remorse. How ought I to thank Heaven for the principles of morality with which you have inspired me ; and perhaps even also for those sentiments which may be called romantic, but which, by exciting exalted ideas of personal dignity and of love, guard one against the seductions of the world, as being too far beneath the chimeras that might have formed the object of terror.

I shall devote my life, I hope, to the interests of my friends, and make the promotion of their happiness my only occupation. I feel deeply interested in the marriage of Matilda ; and I should take a still greater pleasure in it, if she made a warm return to my friendship. But all her measures are calculated, all her expressions are studied. I anticipate her answers ; I am prepared for her visits. Though there is no deception in her character, there is so little met of easy carelessness, that with her you may divine the complex-

ion of your future life with as much precision as if it were already past.

I repeat to you, my dear Louisa, that I wish to return to you, since you are not disposed to come to Paris. How can I renounce the perfect pleasures of our intimacy! Adieu.

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## LETTER IX.

MADAME DE VERNON TO M. DE CLASIMIN, AT HIS SEAT NEAR  
MONTPELLIER.

Paris, May 2.

STILL uneasy, my dear Clasimin, respecting the debt which I have contracted with you! Have I not repeatedly written to you, that the claims of Mad. de Mondeville upon the succession of M. de Vernon were adjusted by the marriage of her son with my daughter? I am to settle upon Matilda, as her dowry, the estate of Audelys, which produces a rental of twenty thousand livres, a sum much larger than her father's fortune. I therefore owe her no account of my guardianship. I had no other embarrassment than this account, and the different sums I had to pay Mad. de Mondeville out of the succession of M. de Vernon. But it is to be stipulated in the marriage contract, that these debts shall not be paid until after my death; and I am thus relieved from putting Matilda in possession of her father's property. I can, therefore, assure you, that your sixty thousand livres shall be remitted to you in less than two months.

To set your mind completely at ease, I shall add that I have not purchased the estate of Audely: it is a present from Mad. d'Albemar to my daughter. I had, hitherto, thought this confidence unnecessary, and I entreat you will keep it a profound secret. Mad. d'Albemar is very rich, and I do not think there is any breach of delicacy in accepting from her a gift, which, considerable as it appears, is not one-third of the fortune settled upon her by her husband. The greater part, you know, of that fortune will return to our family. I saw nothing to prevent me from turning the beneficence of Mad. d'Albemar to the advantage of my daughter and my creditors; but there is no use in making the details of the transaction public.

Your man of business alarmed your fears, by stating to you as a fact, that I was immediately to repay Mad. d'Albemar the forty thousand livres which she lent me at Montpellier. The report is entirely groundless; she never thinks of demanding payment. You would send me twenty letters about your debt, before Mad. d'Albemar would write one upon the subject of hers. Do not be angry, my dear Clasimin, at this assertion. At twenty years of age, one has not the same ideas as at forty. Inattention to self-interest is sometimes engaging in a young person: a due estimation of it is a thing extremely natural at our time of life.

Mad. d'Albemar, the handsomest and most sprightly of women, never thinks that it is necessary for her to submit her conduct to any sort of calculation; hence she may do much mischief to herself, but never to any body else. She sees every thing, knows every thing, when men and manners are to be considered only in a general point of view; but in her own affairs and affections, she is entirely actuated by the first impulse, and never applies her judgment to the regulation of her feelings; fearing, perhaps, that it would destroy those illusions which she delights to cherish. From her fantastic spouse, and a deformed sister, she has received an education altogether philosophical, and altogether romantic. But what is that to us! she is only the more amiable for it; and cool reflecting people are well enough pleased to meet with those giddy characters, upon whom they are always sure of having some hold. Leave the business, therefore, to me, my dear Clasimin; permit me to accomplish the marriage which occupies my intention, and which is necessary in order to satisfy your just demands; and regard this letter, the longest, I believe, I have written in the whole course of my life, as a proof of my anxiety to dissipate all your fears, and of the confidence of an old and very faithful friendship.

SOPHIA DE VERNON.

## LETTER X.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 2.

I YESTERDAY passed an evening at Mad. de Vernon's which has singularly excited my curiosity. I know not whether it will make the same impression upon you.

The Spanish Ambassador, yesterday, introduced to my aunt an old Spanish Duke, M. de Mendoza, who is going in a diplomatic character, to Germany. Having just come from Madrid, and being related to Mad. de Mondeville, Mad. de Vernon asked him a few plain questions respecting Leonce de Mondeville. He seemed, at first, extremely embarrassed in his replies; and, the Spanish Ambassador happening to come up with him as he was speaking, he said, in a very loud tone, that he had not seen M. de Mondeville for six weeks, and that he had not returned to his mother's house. The studied manner in which he thus expressed himself gave me some uneasiness; and as Mad. de Vernon was equally affected by it, I employed every means of knowing something farther upon the subject.

I entered into conversation with a Spaniard whom I had seen once or twice before, and whom I had remarked as a sensible, well-informed man, but somewhat sarcastic. I asked whether he knew the Duke de Mendoza—"Very little," replied he; "but this I know, that there is not a man in the whole court of Spain who is penetrated with such respect for power. It is truly curious to see him salute a minister. His shoulders bend, the moment he discovers him, with a promptitude and activity altogether amusing; and when he raises himself, he continues to regard him with an air so obliging, so affectionate, I had almost said, so languishing, that I am persuaded he has been actually in love with all those who have had any credit at the Court of Spain for thirty years past. His conversation is no less curious than his external deportment. He begins sentences which he leaves the minister to finish; and he finishes those which the minister has begun. Upon whatever subject the minister speaks, the Duke de Mendoza accompanies him with a gracious smile, and with those petty



terms of approbation which resemble a thorough bass, and which, though very monotonous to the ears of the bystanders, are probably very agreeable to him to whom they are addressed. When he finds an opportunity of accusing the minister of taking too little care of his health, and of being too attentive to business, it is difficult to conceive with what energy he impresses those dangerous truths. From the tone in which he speaks, one would imagine he was running every risk for the satisfaction of his conscience; and it is only upon reflection one discovers that, in order to vary the stale forms of common adulation, he attempts that blunt species of flattery which is not so hackneyed. His heart is not naturally bad; he would prefer avoiding to do harm, and he is induced to do it entirely from motives of interest. He possesses, if one may use the expression, the *innocence of meanness*. He does not even surmise that there is any other principle of morals, or of honour, than that of succeeding with men in power. He looks upon every man as a fool, nay almost a knave, who does not imitate his conduct. Is any of his friends degraded, he that instant drops all connexion with him, without any explanation, but merely as a matter of course. If, by chance, he is asked whether he has seen him; he answers, "You know well enough that in the present circumstances I could not——" and here breaking off, he knits his brows, his never-failing indication of the importance which he attaches to the displeasure of his master. But if you do not understand that look, he assumes a peculiar firmness of tone, and explains the servile motives of his conduct, with as much confidence as a man of integrity would show in telling you that he had ceased to see a friend who had forfeited his esteem. He is not respected at the Court of Madrid, yet he always obtains important missions; for placemen have, by this time, certainly learned to laugh at their flatterers, though not to give the preference to men of independent character; and flatterers attain every object, not, as formerly, by succeeding in the arts of deception, but by giving proofs of their pliancy, a quality which is always useful to authority."

This portrait; the truth of which was confirmed in my mind, by the physiognomy and manner of the Duke de Mendoza, somewhat relieved me as to the embarrassment he had shown, when speaking of M. de Mondeville. I resolved, however, to make some farther inquiry; and, after thanking the witty Spaniard, I rejoined the company.

I detained the Duke under various pretences; and when the Ambassador departed, and there were but few persons

present, Mad. de Vernon and I took the Duke aside, and I formally asked whether he did not know something respecting M. de Mondeville, which might prove interesting to the friends of his mother? He looked around, in order to be more completely assured that the Ambassador was gone, and then addressed me in these terms:—"I will speak plainly to you, madam, since you take an interest in Leonce. His situation is bad, but I do not regard it as desperate, could he be brought to listen to reason. He is a young man of five and twenty years of age, of a charming figure, to which all Paris cannot produce a parallel; of lively parts, but extremely obstinate; jealous to madness, of what he calls reputation, that is, public opinion; and ready, for that opinion, or even its shadow, to sacrifice the most important interests of life. I will tell you what has happened. A cousin of M. de Mondeville's, a very good-hearted and a very handsome young man, paid his addresses this winter to Mademoiselle de Sorane, the niece of our present minister, his Excellency Count de Sorane. In a very short period he gained her affections, and seduced her. I must, indeed, confess to you, since we are talking confidentially on this occasion, that Mademoiselle Sorane, who is turned of five and twenty, and who lost both her parents at an early age, had, for several years before, mixed rather too freely with the world. Suspicions, whether just or unjust I will not pretend to say, were entertained of her conduct. But, in the present instance, it seems she was at last resolved to get married, and she made an explicit declaration to that effect of her own intentions, and those of her uncle the minister. There was no room for hesitation; Charles de Mondeville could not make a better match; there was fortune, credit, birth, every thing that could be desired, and I positively know that such was his own opinion. But Leonce, who exercises over the rest of the family an authority much above his age—Leonce, whom they all consult as the oracle of honour, declared, that it was unworthy of his cousin to espouse a woman whose conduct had been contemptible; and, what is the height of folly, added, that it was precisely because she was the niece of a man very high in power, that he must avoid marrying her—"My cousin," said he, "might make a bad marriage, were it evident that love is his only inducement; but as there may be grounds for suspicion, in this instance, that he is impelled by considerations of interest or of fear, I will never see him again if he gives his consent. Mademoiselle de Sorane's brother fought with the relation of M. de Mondeville, and was severely wounded. All Madrid thought

that the marriage would take place, as soon as his cure was completed. It was reported that the minister had declared he would send Charles de Mondeville's regiment to the West Indies, if he did not marry Mademoiselle de Sorane, who, it is said, was uncommonly attached to her intended husband. But Leonce, with an infatuation which I abstain from calling by its proper name, despised the menace of the minister; sought every occasion of showing that he braved it; instigated his cousin to an open breach with the family of Mademoiselle de Sorane; and told every one he met that he waited only for the recovery of her brother, in order to fight him, if he should be disposed to give him the preference to his cousin. The two families were involved in the quarrel. Charles de Mondeville received orders to set out for the West Indies; Mademoiselle de Sorane was left inconsolable, and with a ruined reputation. To complete the catalogue of misfortune, Leonce gave so much displeasure to his Majesty, that he has never since made his appearance at court. You will of course understand, that since that time I have not seen him; and, having left Spain before the brother of Mademoiselle de Sorane was cured, I am not acquainted with the consequences of this affair, but I much fear that they will prove to be very serious, and of great injury to Leonce."

The Spaniard, of whom I had inquired respecting the character of the Duke de Mendoza, drawing near to us at this moment, and hearing the name of M. de Mondeville mentioned, said—"I am acquainted with him, and know all the details of the event of which the Duke has just informed you: permit me to add a few observations, which I think necessary. Leonce, it is true, conducted himself in that affair with a great deal of haughtiness; yet he was the object of general admiration, on account of those very motives which aggravate his guilt in the opinion of his Grace the Duke. The influence of Mademoiselle de Sorane's family was so great, the threats of the Minister were so public, and the conduct of Mademoiselle de Sorane so bad, that it was impossible for any man who should marry her to escape the imputation of imbecility. M. de Mondeville ought, perhaps, to have entirely left his cousin to decide for himself; but he advised him as he himself would have acted; he took as prominent a part as he could, in order to turn the danger upon his own head; and perhaps the sequel will prove, that in this he has been but too successful. He gave a part of his own fortune to his cousin, as a compensation for his voyage to the West Indies. In short, the whole of his conduct demonstrated that he would shrink from no

personal sacrifice, in order to preserve from the slightest stain the reputation of a man who bore the name of his family. The character of M. de Mondeville combines, in the highest degree, dignity, courage, intrepidity; in a word, every thing which can inspire respect: His youthful companions, without his requiring it, and almost against his wishes, pay the most implicit deference to his counsels. His mind possesses a vigour, an energy, which, tempered by the goodness of his heart, every where inspires the highest consideration. When he has been passing, I have frequently seen a party make way for him, from an involuntary movement, at which his friends smiled upon reflection, but which, like every other natural impression, continued to be repeated the moment they were off their guard. It may be true, nevertheless, that Leonce de Mondeville carried, to too high a pitch, his respect for opinion; and it were to be wished, for his own happiness, that he could in some measure disengage himself from its fetters; but in the affair which the Duke has just mentioned to you, his conduct procured him general esteem; and, in my opinion, every one who is attached to him ought to be proud of it."

The Duke made no reply to the advocate of Leonce. There was no advantage to be derived from the contest; and those who make interest their only guide through life, do not argue with much warmth in support of the opinions which they profess, nor against those which they oppose. They practise the habits of concession and silence with their equals, that they may be better prepared to exercise them towards their superiors.

The result of all this discussion is, that I have conceived a very strong curiosity to become perfectly acquainted with the character of Leonce. M. Barton, his preceptor and best friend, and who has performed the part of a father to him for these ten years, is expected here to morrow; and I may confide in what he shall say of his pupil. But is it not already a trait, which does honour to a young man, to have preserved not only a feeling of esteem, but also of attachment and friendship, for one who must necessarily have frequently reprov'd his faults, and even thwarted his inclinations? All the sentiments which spring from gratitude possess a religious character; they elevate the soul of him who feels them. Ah! how fervently do I wish, that Mad. de Vernon may have made a good choice. The peace of her inward life must depend upon the spouse of her daughter. Matilda herself will never be either very happy, or very unhappy; but it cannot be so with Mad. de Vernon. Let us hope that Leonce, who is so proud, so irritable, and

yet so generally admired, will be found to possess that goodness, without which a man of strong feelings and superior understanding, instead of being a desirable companion, becomes rather an object of terror.

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## LETTER XI.

DELPHINE TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 4.

M. BARTON arrived yesterday. I guessed it was he the moment he entered Mad. de Vernon's parlour. While the rest of the company were engaged in play or conversation, he was seated by himself on one side of the fire-place. Matilda, who was on the other side, did not attempt to say a word to him. He seemed embarrassed from his appearance among so many persons to whom he was entirely unknown. Of all societies, that of Paris is perhaps the society in which a stranger at first occasions the greatest restraint. We are accustomed to comprehend each other with such rapidity, to allude to so many received opinions, so many usages and pleasantries already understood, that the moment a new face is introduced, we are afraid of being obliged to make a comment upon every word. I felt for the embarrassing situation of M. de Barton, and went and seated myself beside him without any hesitation. In my opinion, it is doing one a real kindness to relieve him from difficulties of this sort, however unimportant they may be in themselves.

M. Barton is a man of respectable physiognomy: he is dressed in a brown suit, and wears his hair without powder: his exterior is impressive, and he looks more like an Englishman or American, than a Frenchman? Have you never remarked, how easy it is, at the first glance, to perceive the rank which a Frenchman occupies in the world? His pretensions and anxieties scarcely ever fail to betray him, when he has reason to fear that he may be regarded as inferior; whereas the English and Americans display a calm and habitual dignity, which prevents one from judging

of them, or classing them, upon a slight acquaintance. I at first talked to M. Barton upon indifferent topics. He answered me very politely, but with a brevity, which soon convinced me that he was not anxious to make a display of his talents, and that he was not to be interested by addressing his vanity. I gave way, therefore, to my desire of making some inquiries respecting Mad. de Mondeville. His features instantly assumed a new expression; and I could easily perceive that, for a long time past, that name was the only topic which could enliven them. As M. Barton knew that I was a near relation of Matilda, he proceeded almost spontaneously to inform me of all the details which concerned Leonce. He told me, that Leonce had passed his childhood alternately in Spain, which was his mother's native soil, and in France, which was that of his father; that he spoke the languages of both countries with equal fluency, and that he always expressed himself with grace and facility. I learned, in the course of our conversation, that Mad. de Mondeville had an almost insupportable haughtiness of manner, and that Leonce, by softening, with the most attentive and delicate kindness, whatever could tend to hurt the feelings of his preceptor, had inspired him with the most ardent affection. I endeavoured to draw M. Barton into conversation as to what we had been told by the Duke de Mendoza, but he declined answering me. I thought, however, that I could remark the truth of his account, that amidst all the rare qualities of Leonce, he might be reproached with too much vehemence of temper, and particularly with a dread of imputation, carried so far, that the approving testimony of his own mind was not sufficient to constitute his happiness and tranquillity: but this I rather conjectured, than was informed of by M. Barton. He expatiated in praise of the qualities of Mad. de Mondeville's head and heart, with an energy altogether persuasive. I took a pleasure in talking with him almost the whole of the evening. His simplicity led me to remark, in the somewhat laboured graces of the most brilliant circle in Paris, a sort of ridiculousness which had never before struck me. We become habituated to those graces which are sufficiently adapted to the elegance of large societies; but when a natural character appears amongst them, the contrast renders permanent the slightest shades of affectation.

I conversed, almost all the evening, with M. Barton. He spoke of Mad. de Mondeville with so much warmth and interest, that I was captivated by the very pleasure which I gave him, in listening to him. Besides, a man of truth and simplicity, speaking of a sentiment which has occupied the whole of his life, always rouses the attention of a mind capable of entering into his feelings.

M. de Serbellane, and M. de Fierville, however, came to reproach me with not being what they termed so *brilliant* as usual. I grew angry with them, in consequence of their teasing importunities, and got rid of them by returning home at an early hour.

How delightful will be the destiny of my cousin, my dear Louisa, if Leonce be such as M. Barton has depicted him! She will not even receive pain from the only fault which it is possible to find in him, and which, perhaps, is greatly exaggerated. Matilda can run no hazard; she never exposes herself to censure; she will, therefore, perfectly suit Leonce. As to myself, I cannot — but I am not now talking of myself, but of Matilda. She will be much happier than I ever can be. Adieu, my dear Louisa; I must part with you. I feel this evening an indefinite sentiment of melancholy, which to-morrow will doubtless dissipate.—Once more adieu.

## LETTER XII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 3.

I AM dissatisfied with myself, my dear Louisa, and sentence myself, by way of punishment, to give you the recital of a blameable emotion with which I have to reproach myself. It was so transient, that I might almost deny it to my own mind; but to preserve the heart in all its purity, we must not decline self-examination; we must triumph over the repugnance which is felt at confessing the bad sentiments which long lurk in concealment at the bottom of the heart, before they usurp its empire.

For several days M. Barton had been incessantly talking to me of Leonce. He related to me some traits of his life, which stamps him as the noblest of beings. He once showed me a portrait of him, which Matilda has refused to see, with a refinement of prudery which was truly ridiculous; and with this portrait I confess that I was struck. At length, M. Bar-

ton, who daily took greater pleasure in my company, gave me to understand two days ago, towards the end of our conversation, that he did not think the disposition of Matilda calculated to make Leonce happy, and that I was the only woman who was, in his estimation, worthy of his pupil. With whatever ambiguity of manner this insinuation was conveyed, I quickly comprehended it. I was profoundly agitated by it, instantly left M. Barton, and returned home disquieted by the impression I had received from it. A moment's reflection, however, was sufficient to repel, to a great distance, some confused sentiments which it was my duty to banish, as soon as I could perceive them. I resolved to converse no more (in private) with M. Barton, and I imagined this decision had entirely dispelled the image which had occupied my mind. But yesterday, the moment I entered Mad. de Vernon's, M. Barton came up to me, and said: "I have just received a letter from Mad. de Mondeville, acquainting me with his departure from Spain—have the goodness to read it;" and with these words he offered me the letter. What pretext had I to refuse it? Besides, my curiosity preceded my reflection; my eye caught the first lines of the letter, and it was impossible for me not to read it throughout. In truth, my dear Louisa, never did any style combine so much simplicity, dignity and goodness; expression always natural, and always demonstrative of sincerity of friendship, and originality of thought; none of those hackneyed phrases, which indicate only the vacancy of the heart; discretion without coldness; a confidence of that serious-kind, which may be supposed to exist between a young man and his tutor; a thousand shades which in themselves appear of little importance, but which nevertheless characterize the habits of one's whole life; and that elevation of sentiment, the first of qualities, which operates, as by magic, upon hearts of the same mould. The letter concluded with a soft and melancholy allusion to the futurity which awaited him, as connected with a marriage which had been decided upon without his having ever seen Matilda. His mother's inclination, he said, could alone have induced him to submit to it. I repeatedly read over these few words. This circumstance, I suppose, was remarked by M. Barton; for, said he—"Do you think, madam, that the coldness of Mademoiselle Vernon can give happiness to a man of such genuine sensibility?" I know not what answer I was about to make, when M. de Serbellane, scarcely giving himself time to salute Mad. de Vernon, begged I would walk with him into the garden. There is so much evenness and reserve in the habitual manner of M. de Serbellane, that I was alarmed by this unaccustomed abruptness, supposing it betokened some extraordinary event; and fearing that some misfortune had



befallen Theresa, I precipitately left M. Barton, and followed her friend.—“She will be here in a week,” said M. de Serbellane; “there is no time for you to write to her; we must think only of the means of averting from her, if it be possible, the dangers of this proceeding.”—“Ah!” replied I, “what do you tell me? how! have you not been able to——.”—“I have, perhaps, been too urgent,” interrupted he; “for I think, I can discover that the anxiety she feels as to my sentiments, is the principal cause of her journey.—I will relieve her from that anxiety,” added he, “for I am devoted to her for life; but when you have seen M. d’Ervinas, you will easily conceive how much I ought to be alarmed. From the despotism and violence of his character I have every thing to dread for Theresa, should he discover her sentiments; and though he is not distinguished for quickness of apprehension, his vanity is ever so much upon the alert, that in many circumstances, it may supply the place of acuteness and sagacity.”

M. de Serbellane continued this conversation for some time, and I was so warmly interested in it, that I was unconscious of its protraction. At length, however, I concluded it with recommending Theresa to the protection of M. de Serbellane.—“Yes,” said I to him, “I shall not fear to request the very man who has been her seducer to become her guide and her brother in this difficult crisis. Theresa is more impassioned than you; she loves you more than you love her; it is therefore your duty to direct her: of the two, the one who cannot live without the other, is the subject and vassal. In Paris, Theresa has neither relations nor friends; watch over her, therefore, as a generous and tender protector, and repair the wrongs you have done her, by those virtues of the heart, all of which originated in benevolence.”—In uttering these words with some warmth, I happened to place my hand upon the arm of M. de Serbellane: he seized it, and pressed it to his lips, with a feeling of which Theresa alone was the object. At this moment M. Barton entered the walk in which we were; but, on observing us, he turned suddenly round, as if to avoid giving us any interruption. I instantly comprehended his meaning, and overtook him before he regained the drawing-room—“Why do you fly from us?” said I to him, with considerable animation. “From discretion, madam—from discretion!” repeated he, in a manner somewhat affected.—“I see it,” resumed I, “you think I am in love with M. de Serbellane.”—Can you conceive, my dear Louisa, that I should have been so inconsiderate as to address myself, in this language, to a man with whom I was yet scarcely acquainted? But I had been a prey to such violent emotions for an hour before, and was so much agitated, that I had no time for reflection.—“I think of nothing, madam,”

replied M. Barton; "what right have I to."—"Ah! how I detest those evasions," said I, "with a person of my character!"—"But permit me, madam," interrupted M. Barton, "to observe, that I have not long had the honour of being acquainted with you."—"True," said I, yet I shou'd think it very easy to form an opinion of me in a few moments; but I repeat to you, I do not love M. de Serbellane, I do not love him; if I did, I would tell you so."—"That would be improper," replied M. Barton; "I have not yet merited that degree of confidence."—Still more disconcerted by his reasoning, and yet still more uneasy at the opinion he might entertain of my connexions with M. de Serbellane, with a warmth of feeling which I cannot describe, and for which I cannot forgive myself, I was on the point of saying to M. Barton, "I am not, I swear to you, the object of M. de Serbellane's solicitude." But even this sentence, unimportant as it might have been, I did not finish; I protest to you, my dear sister, I did not finish it. M. Barton could have learnt nothing, conjectured nothing, from it; yet I was seized with sincere remorse at the first word which escaped me. I sought a pretence for retiring; and, reflecting upon my conduct, I was indignant at the culpable motive which had excited in me so much emotion.

I dreaded, I cannot conceal it from myself, I dreaded that M. Barton would inform Leonce that my affections were already engaged; I was solicitous, therefore, that Leonce might prefer me to my cousin. It is I myself who made up the match; I am bound by a feeling nearly as powerful as that of gratitude—by the services I have done, the acknowledgments I have received, and the rewards I have enjoyed from them; my friend anticipates the happiness of her daughter, and thinks that to me she is indebted for it.—Could I then be the very person who should snatch the prospect from her view? What could have inspired such a thought? A hiss of pure imagination for a man whom I have never seen, and who perhaps, if I knew him, might excite my dislike! But what if I really loved him! Would not the most imperious sentiments of delicacy, nevertheless condemn to silence even the sincerest attachment? Do not, however, my dear Louise, form so bad an opinion of me, as this recital merits. Have you, yourself, never experienced, that we are sometimes conscious of fleeting emotions, the most repugnant to our nature? It is to explain these contrarieties of the human heart, that the expression is resorted to—*these are the workings of the Devil.*

Virtuous sentiments are interwoven with the native texture of the heart; while vicious sentiments seem to proceed from some foreign influence which disturbs the order and harmony.

of our reflections and our habitual disposition. I request you will fortify my heart by your counsels: the voice which guides the steps of our infancy, is to us identified with the voice of heaven.

## LETTER XIII.

### MADemoiselle D'ALBEMAR'S ANSWER TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, May 14.

No! my dear girl, I should not have condemned you, for cherishing a feeling of interest in Leonce; and if he were found worthy of your heart, and returned your affection, I should not easily conceive, why you should sacrifice your own happiness, not to the gratitude which you owe, but to that which you have merited. But be this as it may, alas! there is no longer time for these reflections. It is but too probable, that, at this moment, the unfortunate young man no longer exists for the happiness of any one! I have the melancholy commission to transmit to you the enclosed letter. You must show it to Mr. Barton, and acquaint Mad. de Vernon and her daughter with the extinction of their brightest hopes. This is the only occasion on which I have felt any warmth of feeling for Mad. de Vernon; but it is unnecessary to add any thing, on my part, to what you will express to her. The being who possesses your friendship, my dear Delphine, can never experience the want of the most tender consolations; and it is you whom I most lament when your friends are unhappy.

I have not the least doubt that it is the base brother of Mademoiselle de Sorane who has been the perpetrator of this abominable crime.

Bayonne, May 10, 1790.

"As you are a relation, Mademoiselle, of Mad. de Vernon's, you must certainly know her address at Paris; and you will transmit to M. Barton, who is supposed to be at present at her house, the intelligence of the melancholy accident which has befallen his pupil, whose only anxiety is to see his preceptor, whom, he says, is at this moment at Mad. de Vernon's in Paris. Poor M. Leonce de Mondeville was recommended to me by a merchant at Madrid, and I expected his arrival yes-

terday evening; but little did I imagine that he would have been conveyed to me in so deplorable a condition.

"In crossing the Pyrennees he walked a little part of the way, while his carriage and his domestic went on before him. In the dusk of the evening he received two wounds of a poniard in the breast, from two men whom he knows, as far as I can learn, from some words which have escaped him, but whose names nothing can induce him to mention. His domestic not seeing him come up, turned back, and found him lying senseless in the middle of the road through the forest. He applied to some peasants, and with their assistance Leonce was conveyed to my house in the same state of insensibility. He was supposed to be dead; but, within this hour he has uttered a few words, to the effect which I have already stated, of requesting that his preceptor should be sent for with the utmost expedition, and that his mother should by no means be informed of his situation.

"The judge has been with me to take his deposition with respect to the assassins. But he refused to give any information; a conduct which I really think too generous. In all respects, however, it is impossible to conceive a more interesting young man; and it is with genuine sorrow, Mademoiselle, that I am compelled to inform you, that the surgeons have pronounced his wound to be mortal. He is so handsome, so young, and so good, that every body weeps at this decision; and my poor family, in particular, are deeply affected by it. Lose no time, I entreat you, madam, in sending his preceptor. He will arrive too late; but, at all events, he will direct us how to act.

"I have the honour to be, with respect, Mademoiselle, your most humble and most obedient servant,

"*THAN, Merchant at Bayonne.*"

## LETTER XIV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

May 19.

AH! my dear sister! of what do you inform me! I am in a state of inexpressible anguish; fearing to lose a moment in apprizing M. Barton, and shuddering at the sorrow which I am doomed to make him feel. I have also to inform Mad. de Vernon and Matilda. How strongly do I sympathize in their affliction! My poor Sophia! the son of her friend! the destined spouse of her daughter!—and Matilda! Ah! How do I reproach myself for having blamed her excessive devotion! Never, perhaps, will she be happy; if her heart had ever opened to the hope of being loved, what would be her present sufferings? Still, she has never seen him—but I, likewise, have never seen him! yet I am bathed in tears, and have not strength enough left to discharge my melancholy duty! But I must submit to it—I go—adieu. In the evening I will give you the result of this cruel task.

At Midnight.

M. Barton, my dear Louisa, set out an hour ago. Worthy man, how much is he to be pitied! Ah! how truly heart-rending are the griefs of advanced life! Alas! old age itself is an habitual sorrow, which imbitters all the other vexations to which it is exposed.

I went to Mad. de Vernon's at six-o'clock. I asked for M. Barton at the gate. He instantly came to me with an alert and cheerful air, which gave me considerable pain. Nothing can be more affecting than the ignorance of a calamity which has already happened, and that tranquillity of countenance which a single word is to destroy. M. Barton stepped into my carriage, and I gave orders to drive us to some distance from Paris. I was contriving several methods of announcing to him this dreadful event: but he quickly remarked the change of my features, and feelingly inquired whether I had met with any misfortune? The very interest which he took in my happiness, prevented him from having the slightest idea that the cause of my pain was one in which he himself was so immediately concerned. I still hesitated as to what I should say; but at length, conceiving there was no possible

preparation for such an affliction, I put into his hand the fatal letter.

—"Read it," said I, with courage and resignation, and without forgetting the friends whom you have left, and whom your unhappiness will attach to you for ever."—Scarcely did this excellent man see the name of Leonce, when he grew pale. He twice read over the letter, as if he could not credit the intelligence which it contained.

At last he let fall the letter, covered his face with both his hands, and wept bitterly, without uttering a word. I accompanied him with tears, alarmed at his silence, and waiting for his first expressions, to discover from what source he should derive consolation. I prayed to heaven for that utterance which can mollify the wounds of the heart. "Oh Leonce," at length exclaimed he, "glory of my life, sole interest of a man without rank, without name, without destiny, is it for me to survive you? Why should this aged blood circulate in my veins, when yours has ceased to flow? What death has fate in reserve for me? Ah! madam," said he, "you are young and beautiful, you take pity on an old man; but you can form no idea of the closing sorrows of an existence without futurity, without hope! You know not my friend, my noble friend, whom the monsters have assassinated. Why would he not name them? But I know them, and will make them known. They shall not live, after having destroyed one of the noblest productions of heaven!" He then called to remembrance the most amiable traits of the infancy and youth of his pupil. He no longer described to me the handsome, proud, spirited Leonce; he no longer retraced those graces and talents which were calculated to please in the world: he dwelt only upon those affecting qualities, the recollection of which is so painfully united with the idea of an eternal separation.

I was agitated by a cruel uncertainty. Ought I, by reminding M. Barton that Leonce had sent for him, to fix his imagination on the possibility of his yet seeing him, and of contributing perhaps to his cure? M. Barton dropped not a single word which indicated such an idea. Was he afraid to entertain it? Did he dread a relapse of sorrow after a revival of hope? My dear Louisa, with what trembling anxiety do we address a person who is truly unhappy! How apprehensive are we of not selecting the expressions suited to the occasion, and of unskilfully touching the sorrows of a broken heart!

At length, however, I said to M. Barton that he should set off, and that he might, perhaps, still flatter himself with finding Leonce alive. This last expression, from which I expected so much, produced no effect. He listened to every word, but without indulging the hope which I presented to his view.

At the age of M. Barton, the heart is not easily moved; its impressions are not speedily renovated; and the same feeling continues to oppress it without any interval of consolation.

Nevertheless, from that moment he spoke only of his departure. He requested I would return with him to Mad. de Vernon's, and I gave orders to that effect. It was agreed between us, that he should set out that very evening in my carriage, and that one of my servants, who is younger than his, should go on before, in order to expedite his journey. He was somewhat revived by attending to these details. Whilst there remains any thing to be done for the being who interests us, our strength is supported, and our hearts do not sink under the pressure of sorrow. We had by this time arrived at my aunt's. Scarcely thinking of what she was doomed to feel, I myself was seized with the most violent emotion. I permitted M. Barton to enter Mad. de Vernon's chamber by himself, when I stopped a few minutes in the parlour to recover myself. At length, subduing the weakness which hindered me from offering consolation to my friend, I entered her apartment. I found her more tranquil than I expected. M. Barton remained silent; Matilda contained herself with some difficulty. Mad. de Vernon came and embraced me. I made an effort to approach Matilda; I observed her alternately redden and grow pale; she pressed my hand in a friendly manner, but instantly left the chamber, making it a point of conscience, I suppose, neither to feel nor show any lively emotion.

Mad. de Vernon then said to me—"Can you think that this very instant I have received a letter from Mad. de Mondeville, to inform me of her consent to the marriage, according to the new proposals I had made to her! It at the same time announces the departure of her son." I clasped Mad. de Vernon a second time in my arms. "At length," said she to me, with her characteristic fortitude, "let us make every preparation to hasten the departure of M. Barton, and submit ourselves to the course of events."—"There is no preparation to make for my journey," said M. Barton, in a tone which I thought expressive of a displeasure, somewhat unjust, at the apparent tranquillity of Mad. de Vernon—"Mad. de Albemar has kindly provided every thing, and I am just setting off."—"It is all very well," replied Mad. de Vernon, who perceived M. Barton's dissatisfaction; and then addressing herself to me, said, in a sort of whisper—"What a degree of zeal and affection he shows for his pupil!"—You must have occasionally remarked, that Mad. de Vernon has a habit of thus directing her praises of any one to a third person, and expressing herself as if unconscious of his presence. But the unhappy Barton did not

pay the least attention to her; he was far from thinking of what impression his grief might make upon others. Had he retained any presence of mind, it would have tended rather to conceal than to make an ostentatious display of it.

Absorbed in anxiety, he left the apartment, without saying a single word to Mad. de Vernon. I followed in order to bring him to my house, where he was to be furnished with every thing necessary for his journey. When we were seated in the carriage, he said, talking to himself—"My dear Leonce, your only friends—your unhappy preceptor, and your poor mother!" And then, turning towards me:—"Yes!" exclaimed he, "I will travel day and night, in order to see him once more: perhaps he may still be able to bid me a last adieu. I will pass the rest of my life near his tomb, to watch over his last remains, and thus show myself worthy of being interred in the same grave."—As he thus spoke, the unfortunate old man gave way to a fresh paroxysm of despair.—"Madam," then said he to me, "in your presence I shed tears; a moment ago, I was calm; your goodness will not reject this mournful proof of confidence—I am convinced you will not reject it."

On my arrival at home, I took every precaution, that I could think of, to render M. Barton's journey as comfortable and as expeditious as possible. He was sensible of my attentions, and, when just ready to step into the carriage, said to me—"Madam, should any letters arrive from Bayonne, in my absence, I dare not say from Leonce, but should it so happen, even from Leonce himself, open them; you will see what they may require to be done, and write to me at Bourdeaux."—"Is it not Mad. de Vernon," said I, "that ought to."—"No!" replied he, "madam, permit me to repeat that it is you whom I wish to perform that office. Alas! at this parting moment, when it is but too probable that I shall never again see you, permit me to declare to you a thought, perhaps an absurd one, which I had conceived for the benefit of my unfortunate pupil. I did not think that he could be, in any respect, happy with Mademoiselle de Vernon, and in you I ventured to remark every thing that could best accord with his mind and his feelings." I was about to answer him, but he pressed my hand with a kind of paternal affection, which reminded me of M. d'Albemar, and never have I experienced it without emotion. He then said, "Be not offended, madam, with the freedom of an old man who cherishes Leonce as a son, and whom your kindnesses have touched to the heart. Alas! these soothing chimeras are all dispelled by death! Death!"—He darted out of my chamber, and threw himself into the coach in an agony which redoubled my pity.

Being now left alone, I could give way to that sorrow which I also experienced. It was enough for me to sympathize



in the sufferings of others, but that which I myself felt was not less painful, though the destiny of the unfortunate young man was totally unallied to mine. My aunt and my cousin regret him for their own sakes, and on account of the happiness he was to procure them; I, whom fate has irrevocably torn from him, weep for a heart so excellent, a mind so liberally endowed, perishing in the dawn of life. Yes! if he die, I will worship him in my heart; I shall persuade myself that I have loved him, that I have lost him; and I shall prove faithful to his memory. This will be a pleasing feeling—the object of a melancholy unmixed with bitterness. I will solicit his portrait from M. Barton; and ever will I preserve the image as that of a hero of romance, whose prototype is no longer in existence. It is some time since I renounced the hope of ever meeting one who should possess all the affections of my heart; I am now assured of it, and this certainty is all that is necessary to enable me quietly to descend into the vale of life.

But Leonce may live; if he do, he will be the husband of Matilda; then there will be more chimera, but accompanied with more regrets. Adieu, my dear Louisa: it is possible, that I shall shortly rejoin you for ever.

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## LETTER XV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 22.

I THIS evening found more attractions than ever, in the conversation of Mad. de Vernon, and yet for the first time, has my heart made her a real reproach. In speaking of her to you, with so much frankness, my dear Louisa, I give you the greatest possible mark of confidence; but do not, I entreat you, make any inference unfavourable to my friend. I may be mistaken as to a fault which a thousand motives might excuse. But I am assuredly right, when I reflect that the inmost qualities of the soul can alone inspire that perfect delicacy in discourses, and even in the most trifling phrase, which renders so attractive the conversation of Mad. de Vernon.

I had been painfully agitated during the whole of the day. The image of Leonce still pursued me; I could not shut my eyes without seeing him wounded, bleeding, and ready to expire. My imagination painted him in the most engaging features, and this picture incessantly drew forth my tears. About eight in the evening, I went to Mad. de Vernon's. Matilda had passed the whole day at church, and on her return had gone to bed, without testifying the slightest desire of conversing with her mother. I therefore found Sophia alone, and sufficiently pensive; I myself was still more so. We sat down together on one of the seats in her garden, at first, without exchanging a word; but she soon brightened up, and made me pass an hour in a state of mind much better than I could have expected. The mildness, and even softness of her conversation possess an indescribable grace, which suspended my sufferings. She followed my impressions in order to alleviate them; she did not combat any of my feelings, but imperceptibly modified them. I was less melancholy, without knowing to what to attribute the change; so it was, however, that in her society I felt somewhat relieved.

I directed our conversation to those grand topics to which the mind, when under the impression of melancholy, is irresistibly borne;—the uncertainty of human destiny, the ambition of our desires, the bitterness of our regrets, the fear of death, the fatigue of life, in short, all those wanderings of the heart in which feeling souls are most apt to indulge. She took a pleasure in listening to me, and whilst she encouraged me to proceed, occasionally introduced some just and apposite remarks, and sustained and reanimated my ideas as often as she found them beginning to flag. When I entered her house, I was dejected and dissatisfied with my feelings, without wishing to declare it. But she must, I should think, have divined every thing which occupied my thoughts, for she spoke precisely what my situation required. She raised me, by degrees, in my own esteem; I was better pleased with myself; and it was only upon reflection that I discovered it was she who had thus modified my most secret thoughts. In short, I felt considerable consolation in the inmost recesses of my heart, and, at the same time, was perfectly aware that, in quitting Sophia, I should again become a prey to anxiety and dejection.

This presentiment led me to exclaim with a degree of enthusiasm—"Ah! my friend, let us not separate; let us pass many a long hour in conversing with each other; I shall experience a relapse, the moment you cease to talk to me!"—As I uttered these words, a domestic entered and informed Mad. de Vernon, that M. de Fierville wished to see her, though he was told at the gate that she was not at home to any body!—"Refuse his visit, I conjure you, my dear Sophia,"

said I with some warmth.—“Do you know,” interrupted Mad. de Vernon, “whether the nephew of Mad. de Marsez has gained or lost the important process on which all his fortune depended?”—“Why!” interrupted I, “I was told yesterday that he had gained it; so that you have not to console M. de Fierville for the regrets of his friend;—do not see him.”—“I must see him,” said Mad. de Vernon, at the same time making a sign to her domestic to show him up stairs. I felt hurt, I must confess, and my countenance expressed what I felt. Mad. de Vernon remarked it, and said to me—“It is not on my own account, but that of my daughter——.”—“What!” exclaimed I with some animation, “do you already think of a substitute for Leonce? Poor young man! you have not been long lamented by your mother’s friend!”—I reproached myself for these expressions the moment I had finished them; for Mad. de Vernon blushed upon hearing them; and, as I was going away, without any attempt on her part to detain me, I stood a few minutes after the entrance of M. de Fierville, with my hand upon the key of the drawing-room door; and delaying to open it. Mad. de Vernon at last remarking my position, came up to me, and, without making me any reproach, dwelt much upon the importance which she attached to the union of her daughter with Leonce, and all the circumstances which would render such a marriage a thousand times preferable to any other. She then gradually resumed her accustomed gracefulness of manner, and, after embracing her, I took my leave; but I shall, nevertheless, long retain some traces of what has passed.

Can you conceive that I should be so foolish, my dear Louisa? What, perhaps, has so deeply wounded my feelings, is an expression of indifference for Leonce! Why should I wish that Mad. de Vernon felt a profound regret for him, and that she should not look out another husband for her daughter? She has never seen him; yet is it not true, my dear Louisa, that this would be to console one’s self in too short a period, for the loss of so distinguished a young man? Ah! were it possible to preserve his life, it is Matilda who would enjoy the happiness of being loved by him.—She would not have suffered from his danger; yet it is for her he would be reanimated.—The calmness of her imagination and her affections preserve her from the bitterest troubles of life. There is no resemblance, Louisa, between her and your

DELPHINE.

## LETTER XVI.

MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, May 30, 1790.

I LOSE not a moment to acquaint you, my dear Delphine, that M. de Mondeville is better. A skilful surgeon has attended him with much success. As soon as the bleeding was stopped, he was pronounced to be out of danger. He would already have resumed his journey, were it not to be feared that his wounds would be opened again by the motion of the carriage. He has written a letter to M. Barton, which Telin has sent under cover to me, in order to request that you will see it safely delivered. This letter you will find enclosed.

There must be something extremely engaging in Leonce, to induce this old merchant of Bayonne, Telin, whose whole life has been occupied only with the means of making money, to write letters filled from beginning to end with eulogies on the generous qualities of M. de Mondeville. In reality I begin to think that he has turned poor Telin's brain! seriously, it must be an extraordinary species of merit which makes so deep an impression even upon the vulgar class of mankind, and I should confide much more in qualities which produce their effect upon all the world, than in those mysterious superiorities which are recognised only by the adepts.

Dear Delphine, it is by this time very probable, that you will soon have an opportunity of seeing M. de Mondeville. Your imagination is singularly prepared to receive a strong impression from his presence. Guard yourself against this disposition, I conjure you, and repossess your mind of that complete independence, which will be necessary for the purpose of forming a correct judgment.

## LETTER XVII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 25.

THE letter from Leonee, which you have sent me, my dear sister, is extremely remarkable. As M. Barton had given me permission, I opened and read it. I have been perusing it these two hours, and, in that time, it has suggested to be a multiplicity of ideas entirely new to my mind. I shall communicate my reflections to you another time. The only thing I am anxious to tell you is, that the reading of this letter has entirely calmed those ideas which disturbed my repose, and I have no longer to fear that unjustifiable emotion which made me envy the fate of my cousin.

## LETTER XVIII.\*

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Bayonne, May 17, 1790.

I FEAR, my dear friend, that you have already set off, on receiving the intelligence of my accident, and, as soon as you were informed that I expressed a desire to see you. I ought to have spared you the fatigue of such a journey, but you will forgive your pupil for the anxiety which he had of bidding you adieu at his last moment. If you are still at Paris, wait there for my arrival; I shall be able to travel in a few days. I am desired not to speak, for fear of the wounds in my breast opening again. But, at least, I have time to write to you all that relates to the event, with the secret of which you alone are acquainted.

\*The letter enclosed in Mademoiselle d'Albemar's to Delphine.

I know the enraged adversary who made an attempt to assassinate me, and who attacked me in conjunction with his servant, without leaving me any means of self-defence. As he stabbed me with the poniard, he exclaimed in a furious tone, *I avenge the wrongs of my dishonoured sister.* I should have pronounced the author of this act infamous, did not the motives which have irritated him against me merit some degree of indulgence. You know these motives, and you can easily guess the assailant.

My cousin, in submitting to my counsels, followed them up, nevertheless, in the manner most feeble and absurd. He has proved to me, that one should never attempt to make a man act in a direction opposite to his character. Nature furnishes remedies for all her evils. The weak man hazards nothing; the man of decisive character supports every thing which he advances; but when the former acts under the directions of the latter, he moves as it were by fits and starts, he undertakes more than he can perform, distrusts his own powers, exaggerates what he is unable to imitate, and commits the most inconsistent blunders; he unites the inconveniences of opposite characters, instead of skilfully combining their different advantages.

Charles-de Mondeville allowed the family of Mademoiselle de Sorane to discover that he followed my advice in some respect contrary to his inclinations. Thus all their hatred was directed at me. M. de Sorane was obliged to conclude a very indifferent match for his sister, to stifle as speedily as possible the rumour of her adventure. The fear of making the affair still more public prevented him from challenging me. He regarded assassination as a more secret and certain means of vengeance: he doubtless imagined that if I should be killed in the mountains of the Pyrennees, my death would be attributed to the French or Spanish robbers, who are so numerous on the frontiers of both countries.

I would have made M. de Sorane answer for his crime to the laws of his country, had I not been convinced that he was really very unhappy in consequence of the loss of his sister's character, and that he had reason to blame me for the opposition of my cousin to his wishes. Being compelled, by an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances, to sacrifice the reputation of Mademoiselle de Sorane to the honour of my family, I have thought it my duty not to disclose the name of a man who had become my assassin merely to avenge the cause of his sister. His hatred of me was natural; the injury I had done him proceeded perhaps from a defect in my character: you have frequently observed that opinion possessed too much influence over me. If it be true that M. de Sorane had reason to complain of my conduct, I owe to him secrecy respecting

crime which I have provoked. I have therefore concealed it, and with you it will be as sacred as with myself.

But, my dear Barton, I perceive, that though trembling for the danger I have encountered, you will not express yourself with any bitterness of displeasure respecting the conduct of your pupil, in exposing too lightly that life which you and my mother so much value. This idea, which arose in my mind when I thought myself dying, was not unaccompanied with regret.—Perhaps I ought to have left my cousin to himself, though he is related to me, and bears the name of my family. But let me ask you, whose sentiments are more moderate, and who attach less importance to the opinion of the world, this question—“Had I been in the situation of Charles de Monderville, would not you have been the first to advise me against marrying a woman generally disrespected, even though I had loved her?”

During two days I have passed between the hope of life and fear of death, I have reflected much on the advice you have constantly given me to regulate my conduct only by the dictates of reason and conscience. You are at once a Christian and a philosopher. You trust in God, and you account as nothing the injustice of man: you know I am little disposed to adopt any kind of religious belief, and still less that patience and resignation which we are told faith is capable of inspiring. Though I have received, thanks to you, an enlightened education, still however a sort of military instinct, prejudices, if you will call them so, but the prejudices of my ancestors, which perfectly accord with the ardour and impetuosity of my soul, are the most powerful motive of every action of my life. Were I to fancy for a moment that any man, even at the distance of a hundred leagues from me, dared to pronounce my name, or that of any of my friends, with disrespect, I should experience the strongest emotions of indignation, and an eager desire to be there to avenge myself. Most men, you will say, do not deserve that we should attach the least importance to their discourse. Their hatred, indeed, may be nothing, but their insolence is always something. They equal you; they do more, they believe themselves your superiors when they calumniate you. Ought they to be allowed to enjoy, unmolested, this insolent pleasure?

Besides, have you reflected on the rapidity with which a man may be irrecoverably deprived of all consideration? If indifferent to the first slanders that are circulated against him; if his delicacy supports the more slight insults, what feeling will rouse him when the affront is of a nature not to be endured? False reports, which have had currency for a time, are implicitly believed as truths by many who are ignorant of the real character of the person accused. He is at

last irritated, but it is too late. Though he should involve himself in twenty duels, will unseasonable traits of courage establish the reputation he has lost? All these violent efforts present the idea of tumultuous agitation, and we respect not him who is thus agitated; calmness and dignity can alone ensure respect. That which was the work of time cannot be reconquered in a few days. Anger permits no repose, and renders its victims incapable of finding tranquillity, or of waiting for the remedy of the evils which afflict them. I know not what may be reserved for us in another world; but the greatest torment of this to a man of spirit is, to have to endure the slightest diminution of that unsullied reputation for honour and delicacy which forms the richest treasure of existence.

I have ceased to combat these sentiments in my own bosom; I acknowledge them invincible; but if ever they should be found in opposition to true morality, I hope I shall triumph over them. To your instructions, my dear master, I am indebted for this hope: but in resolutions which regard only myself, I should be to blame were I to struggle against a fault which I cannot brave without sacrificing all my happiness. It is better to expose one's life a thousand times, than to suffer the least stigma to be attached to our character.

I believe that I do not render those around me unhappy: why then should I torment myself by efforts perhaps useless, and certainly very painful? Must not the respect I am ambitious of obtaining in the world tend to honour all those who love me? Is not man naturally the protector of his mother, his sister, and, above all, of his wife? Ought he not to give to the companion of his life that example of respect for reputation which he would exact from her in her turn? Do you know why I have hitherto guarded against love, though I am fully convinced of the empire that passion would have over my heart? The reason is obvious; I dread lest I should love a woman less devoted to opinion than myself, but whose charms might still attract me, though her sentiments gave me much pain. I was afraid of being agitated by two opposite and contending powers; the one a feeling and passionate heart; the other a bold and irritable temper.

My mother was in the right in wishing me to espouse a woman who will have no great dominion over me, but whose conduct is regulated by the most rigid principles. Alas! am I then, at the age of twenty, for ever to abandon the hope of uniting myself to a woman to whom I can be attached—to a woman who would fill up the void of my heart by all the endearments of mutual affection? No! life is not that enchanting scene which my fancy has sometimes drawn. It presents a thousand inevitable ills; it abounds with numberless evils.



to be dreaded for the destruction of our reputation and our repose; numberless enemies constantly laying snares for us.—Firmness and severity are therefore necessary to conduct us through this painful journey, and to guard us against censure, even at the expense of happiness.

After having read this letter, will you still be dissatisfied with me, my dear friend! Whatever opinion you may entertain of me, you must be convinced, that you have a pupil who has no secret that he wishes to conceal from you, and that your counsels will at all times be requisite for the regulation of his conduct.

LEONCE,

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## LETTER XIX.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

May 27.

I HAVE repeatedly read the letter in which Leonce, with so much exactness, portrays his own character. You have not, however, concluded, I hope, from the few lines I hastily wrote you, that my esteem for M. de Mondeville is in the least abated. This is very far from being the case, I assure you: his letter to M. de Barton, on the contrary, indicates a great superiority of mind, and such qualities as we seldom meet with in life: but what has struck me most forcibly, is the astonishing diversity of our two characters.

He regulates the most important actions of his life by the opinion of the world; whereas I, on the contrary, can with difficulty allow it to influence me, even in circumstances the most trifling and insignificant. The ideas and motives which religion suggests he passes over unnoticed; a necessary consequence, no doubt, of his implicit submission to public opinion; whilst I, you know, thanks to the happy education which you and your brother have given me, look to God and my own conscience only for the approbation of my conduct. Far from courting the applause of the majority of mankind by the little punctilios which are necessary to procure it; I am almost tempted to believe, that the approbation of men would tarnish whatever is most pure and most estimable in virtue, and that

the pleasure derived from this approbation would have a tendency to sully the natural and intuitive suggestions of a good heart.

Notwithstanding the irritability of Leonce, however, on every point in which the opinion of the world is concerned, it is impossible not to discover in him a soul at once virtuous and feeling: but do not regret, my dear sister, his engagements with Matilda: rather be glad that he can never be any thing to me but an object of indifference. The radical difference of our sentiments, and the opposite modes of life to which we have been accustomed, are precisely such as would render superlatively unhappy two individuals who ought to love one another without the possibility of a misunderstanding.

It would be impossible for me, whatever resolutions I might form, to guard all my actions so cautiously, that no room should be left for the false glosses and misrepresentations of society; and what would be my sufferings if the man whom I loved were unable to bear without chagrin, the false interpretations that might be given of my conduct;—if constantly under the necessity of studying the opinions of those who are indifferent to me, only from their influence over the man who was the object of my fondest affections;—of dreading every species of calumny, because he would equally suffer from all;—and of yielding submissively to the empire of opinion, because I loved a man who was its most devoted slave.

No, Leonce, no, my dear Louisa, such a situation could not suit your Delphine. How much more did the sentiments of your generous brother, my noble protector, accord with mine! He often repeated to me, that a generous and elevated mind had only one principle to observe in the conduct of life, always to do good to others, but never to injure them. What signify to her who believes in the protection of the Supreme Being, and lives under the constant impression of his presence; to her who possesses an elevated soul, and enjoys within herself the conscious dignity of virtue: what signify to her, said M. d'Albemar, the sentiments or opinions of men? Sooner or later she will obtain their esteem; for it is on the basis of truth, at last, that public opinion will always be formed: It is necessary, therefore, to learn to despise those temporary commotions which calumny, which folly and envy often excite against the most worthy and distinguished characters. I must confess, he would add, that this independence of mind, this exertion of philosophy, is, perhaps, still more becoming in a man than in a woman; but he believed also, that women, being in much greater danger than men of being misrepresented, ought in the early period of life to fortify their minds against this inconvenience. As regard for opinion renders so many of our sex false and dissembling, and that the sincerity and simplicity

ty of my character might not be in danger, M. d'Albemar laboured with the greatest efforts of industry to emancipate me from this oppressive yoke; and, indeed, his efforts have been correspondent to his wishes, for I fear nothing on earth but the just reproaches of my own heart, or the unjust and ill-founded reproaches of my friends. But whether public opinion justify or condemn me, it will never be capable of either increasing or diminishing my happiness. My resources are within myself. I feel within my own bosom a consolatory hope, which shall never fail to animate me, as often as I raise my eyes towards heaven, and feel my heart aspire after true glory, and the perfection of virt e.

What would become, however, of this happiness and tranquillity, which I am anxious to enjoy, if by any unaccountable reverse of fortune, were it only a weak and helpless woman who had courage to despise the opinion of men, whilst he who ought to guide and direct me, he who ought to assist and protect me, would tremble at the least breath of slander? In vain I should endeavour to conform myself to all his wishes by adopting a conduct so repugnant to my natural character: I could not even by that means avoid the commission of inevitable mistakes, and our painful and wretched lives would thus, perhaps, terminate in some fatal disaster.

No; I cannot love Leonce; were he even disengaged, I would not love him. I have found it necessary frequently to repeat this to myself, to read his letter again and again, to efface, by long and serious reflection, the impression which the danger to which he has just been exposed had made upon my heart, and I have at last been successful. I have gained a victory; my soul is collected, and I could at this moment see him with the utmost indifference, and the most confirmed resolution to behold nothing in him henceforth but the husband of Matilda.

## LETTER XX.

DELPINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

May 31.

WHAT did I write you, my dear Louisa, in my last? I am afraid I must now unsay every thing: I have seen him: yes, I have seen Leonce, and I no longer remember the sentiments I entertained against him. How was it possible I could lay such emphasis on what I was pleased to denominate his faults? How unreasonable was it to form my opinion of him from a single letter only? His features—his countenance is a much better-index of his heart.

I received a letter yesterday from M. Barton, who informed me that he had met M. de Mondeville at Bourdeaux, and that they were returning together. I went to Mad. de Vernon's to announce to her the agreeable intelligence: my heart was easy, and my mind perfectly serene. Leonce's letter had produced a complete revolution in my sentiments; I cannot yet account for the impression it made, but on more mature reflection, I find it was foolish and absurd. Leonce, however, was really no longer an object of interest to me, otherwise than as the husband of Matilda and the son-in-law of my friend; and I conversed for two hours with Mad. de Vernon, on the different articles that related to the marriage, with an interest and feeling that gave her the highest pleasure. She did not entertain the smallest suspicion of those sentiments which had for some days given me so much uneasiness: the conversation, however, in regard to Leonce, was by no means protracted, for I involuntarily permitted it to drop, whereas yesterday, I know not from what ideas of security, on the very eve of danger, I was inexhaustible on the motives which ought to induce Mad. de Vernon to pursue her arrangements in favour of her daughter. I am as yet unable to comprehend from what principle this strange and unaccountable sentiment could originate; I was anxious, I believe, to form engagements with my own heart, for this vivacity, I am persuaded, could not have been natural: it pleased Mad. de Vernon, however, who pressed me very warmly to spend the next day with her entirely.

After dinner M. Barton was unexpectedly announced. His aspect had the appearance of melancholy: my heart foreboded

some unfortunate event, and I questioned him with apprehension and timidity. "M. de Mondeville," he replied, "arrived with me yesterday; but on the road his wound opened afresh, and I am much afraid that the loss of blood he sustained may endanger his life. He is in such a state of weakness and dejection as distresses me extremely. His fever also is returned for some days, and he is just now in a condition that not only disqualifies him for going abroad, but even renders him unable to sit up in his chamber. He wishes," added M. Barton, addressing himself to Mad. de Vernon, "to put into your hands, madam, some letters from his mother. He takes the liberty also of requesting you to come and see him; but dares scarcely flatter himself that Mademoiselle de Vernon will condescend to accompany you: however, it appears to me, that at present, as the articles are signed by Mad. de Mondeville, there can be no impropriety."

Matilda interrupted M. Barton, and, rising, said to him in a tone of voice that appeared harsh and unfeeling, "I will not go, sir: I am determined, I shall not go."

Mad. de Vernon never attempts to oppose the inclinations of her daughter when so positively expressed. She has something in her disposition so easy, that it even approaches to indolence, and makes her dread every species of discussion. It is never by forcible means of any description that she endeavours to gain the object of her wishes. Without replying to Matilda, therefore, she addressed herself to me. "My dear Delphine," says she, "you will have the goodness to accompany me; we shall go and see Leonce immediately with M. Barton."—I excused myself at first; though, from a feeling which I am unable to explain, I was so much disgusted with the refusal of Matilda, that it gave me some pleasure to oppose my own frankness to her ridiculous prudery. Mad. de Vernon insisted: she was embarrassed, however, by that sort of timid reserve to which she is sometimes liable in the presence of the stranger. She was afraid of those first impressions, under the influence of which Leonce might abandon himself to emotions of tenderness. I have always observed Mad. de Vernon apprehensive of every circumstance that would necessarily lead her to employ the exterior forms of regard, even where her affection was sincere. They accuse her of being deceitful: she is, however, wholly incapable of affectation. Is it possible there can be a combination so singular and extraordinary? I will not believe it.

At last, when I could no longer doubt that Mad. de Vernon was sincere in her desire that I should accompany her, I consented. When we had got into the carriage, however, I immediately recollected the letter of Leonce to M. Barton, and it forcibly occurred to me, that a man so nicely delicate in every

article that respects the established forms of propriety, would regard it most probably as a thing very inconsiderate, that a woman of my age should thus visit him at his own lodgings without any previous acquaintance. This idea hurt me so much, that I ascended the staircase to Leonce's chamber with considerable chagrin. But the moment we entered, when I beheld him stretched on a sofa, pale, scarcely able to raise his head to welcome us; but still, even in this condition, preserving the most affecting and dignified image of distress and melancholy, I instantaneously experienced the most lively and animated emotion. Love and pity at the same moment took possession of my heart: every feeling of my soul spoke at once in favour of this unfortunate young man. His elegant form had in it something enchanting, in spite of the extreme weakness, which did not permit him to support himself. There was not a single feature in his countenance that did not, even in the extreme weakness to which he was reduced, inspire my heart with the most seductive and flattering impressions. I continued standing behind M. Barton and Mad. de Vernon some moments. Leonce, in a soft but firm tone of voice, made some grateful acknowledgments to my aunt: his manners and accent communicated to his language, the plainest and most simple, an expression that was new and interesting; but at every word he uttered, his paleness seemed to increase, and by a movement altogether involuntary, I endeavoured to retain my breath while he spoke, as if I had had it in my power to assist or diminish his efforts.

When we had taken our seats, he then observed me, and addressing my aunt, he asked if I was Mademoiselle de Vernon. "No," replied my aunt, "she has not yet courage to visit you. This is my niece, Mad. d'Albemar."—"Mad. d'Albemar!" replied Leonce, in an animated tone, "she who was so anxious to lend her carriage to M. Barton, that he might be enabled to find me! she who has interested herself so much in my fate, even before knowing me! I am very much ashamed," added he, endeavouring to raise his voice, "I am very much ashamed of being in a condition so ill qualified to express to her my gratitude." I was just going to answer him, when, upon concluding these words, his head fell motionless upon his hand. I made an effort to rise and give him assistance; but immediately blushing at what my feelings had suggested, I again sat down, and was silent. Leonce also was silent for some minutes; but so much sweetness and sensibility was painted in his countenance, that I entirely forgot the opinion I had formed of him, and which alone could guard and protect the affections of my heart. Every moment it became more difficult to conceal my tenderness. The black eyes of Leonce, in spite of his efforts, were involuntarily closed; but the moment

he looked up, he directed his attention to me. His eager looks, which seemed to solicit an interest in my heart, appeared to me to demand some favourable reply, I even imagined that he explained his thoughts, and felt myself as sensibly moved as if he had conversed with me for a considerable time.

Are you not ashamed of me, *Louisa*? You will certainly blame this sudden and deep impression; but it was pity, I am certain, that gave rise to it. Your *Delphine* could not, on a first interview, be so accessible to love. It was compassion, all-powerful compassion, that excited in my bosom that sympathy which is the strongest, the most instantaneous, and irresistible affection of the heart.

*Leonce*, I am persuaded, saw the interest I took in his situation; for although I had not uttered a syllable, he began to comfort me.—“It is nothing, madam,” said he; “the fatigue of my journey laid open my wound, but it is now closed, and in a few days I shall be perfectly well.”—I wished to make some reply, but I was afraid lest, in speaking, my voice should appear altered, and stopped short without concluding the sentence I had begun. *Mad. de Vernon* made some inquiries concerning *Mad. de Mondeville*, and very feelingly reminded him how impatient she was to see him. To her inquiries he answered with a feeble but agreeable tone. *Mad. de Vernon*, at last afraid of fatiguing him, arose, affectionately took his hand, and gave her arm to *M. Barton* to depart.

I advanced to *Leonce* after my aunt, wishing at last to express my concern also for his present situation. He rose to thank me before it was in my power to prevent him, and wished to accompany me a few steps to the door: but a sudden and alarming giddiness immediately seized him: he made an effort to prevent himself from falling; I involuntarily presented him my arm,—and his head fell on my shoulder. I really believed he was going to expire. O! *Louisa*, who would not have been distressed at such a moment!—I lost every idea of myself and of others; wholly engrossed by this idea alone, I exclaimed—“Oh! my aunt come to his assistance, look at him, he is dying;”—and my face was covered with tears. *M. Barton* hastily returned, supported *Leonce* in his arms, and led him back to the sofa. *Leonce* revived; he opened his eyes before I had wiped off my tears; and his looks, full of acknowledgments and tenderness, informed me that he observed my emotion.

I then took my leave, and *Mad. de Vernon* followed me; it was dark when we returned: I don't think she could perceive the pain I had suffered; and even if she did, was it not natural I should feel distressed at the situation in which I had seen *Leonce*? When we reached *Mad. de Vernon's* door, I was informed that *M. de Serbellane* had been twice inquiring for

me; and I availed myself of this pretence to return immediately home, where I shut myself up, to write you these particulars.

After the detail I have given you, my dear Louisa, you will no doubt tremble for my safety: do not forget, however, how much pity had a share in producing my emotions. The tenderness which distress and suffering inspires not unfrequently deceives a mind possessed of acute sensibility. It may happen that we believe ourselves in love when we are only animated by sentiments of compassion. But I am determined no more to accompany Mad. de Vernon to M. de Mondeville's; he will soon be acquainted with Matilda; her beauty will charm him, and I shall then be able to see him with those sentiments only that reason and delicacy ought to dictate. My friend, my dearest Louisa, I am even already more tranquil; but is it not a misfortune to have seen him surrounded with all the affecting circumstances that accompany danger and suffering? Why was not the husband of Matilda at first presented to me in the midst of that prosperity and of those gay and flattering advantages that await him? Why was it necessary he should interest my compassion?

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## LETTER XXI.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

June 1st.

My mother informs me, my dear Barton, she has written to you, in order to commit to your management some affairs at Mondeville, which it is necessary, she says, to arrange before my marriage. I request of you not to set out yet for that part of the country. I know you are accustomed with the most scrupulous exactness to regulate all your measures; but my servant will bring you this letter to-morrow to your new lodgings: you will not then tell me, I hope, that you have already made your arrangements for your departure, and that you cannot now alter them. In a few days I shall be able to get out and see Mademoiselle de Vernon. Can a marriage, my dear friend, be considered as positively determined, when the parties chiefly interested are yet unknown to each other? How much reason had you, alas! to talk to me of Mad. d'Al-



bemar as the most lovely and engaging of her sex! You have boasted to me of the charms of her conversation, of the elevation and goodness of her heart, but you never could have painted to me the gracefulness of her figure; the enchanting ease, the elegance and freedom of her manner; those auburn locks which half conceal her eyes, so soft and sweet, but at the same time so piercing and animated; that varied physiognomy, and that air of freedom, much purer, much more innocent and modest than a ceremonious and austere reserve. I was between life and death when I heard her exclaim—"Oh! my aunt, come, come to his assistance; he is dying!" For a moment I could not help believing that I was in another world, and that it was the voice of an angel who was waiting to conduct my soul to the felicity of the immortals.

When I opened my eyes, Delphine looked only at me, and her whole countenance expressed a compassion that was more than mortal. She withdrew, but I shall never forget her physiognomy at that moment.

Oh! sweet and soothing pity! if thy emotion was sufficient to render her so enchantingly beautiful, what would she have appeared had love spread its charms over her divine countenance? Yes, my friend, every grace, every charm that distinguishes her figure is the amiable index of some quality within. Her carriage is so free, and her movements so light and easy when she walks, that you would imagine her steps required support; her looks, which indicate a superior understanding, and at the same time a gentle and pliant disposition, are all so many proofs of that extraordinary assemblage of character you pointed out to me when you told me, on our journey, that she united understanding and a mind quite independent, with a heart the most susceptible and devoted, where she meets with an object of affection. It was upon this principle you explained to me her affectionate regard for Mademoiselle de Vernon, approaching almost to submission. Do not blame yourself, however, my dear Barton, for the impression which Mademoiselle d'Albemar has made upon my heart. From you I learned nothing; it was her own looks only that told me every thing.

But do not flatter yourself, at the same time, that I reflect with unconcern upon the emotions with which she has inspired me.—I know my duty to my mother; I even respect it to such a degree, that I have not hitherto examined the validity of those engagements which she has formed with Mademoiselle de Vernon: but I will confess to you, that since I have seen Mademoiselle d'Albemar, the idea of being no longer free would be odious to me. If it is impossible I can be any longer so, allow me at least some time to judge of my own feelings and sentiments.

My dear friend and master, if I am convinced that my mother's honour is interested, however indiscreetly, in my marriage with Mademoiselle de Vernon, you may depend upon it, I shall comply. Why then are you afraid of granting me time? Adieu! I expect you this morning, but I am glad of having written what this letter contains; you know it now, and it would have cost me some efforts to have told you it.

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## LETTER XXII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

June 3d.

LEONCE is much better, and will in a short time be so far recovered as to be able to come abroad: I have not seen him again. Mad. de Vernon has been once more at his house alone; I would have declined going with her, but she did not propose it. I have not had another opportunity of seeing M. Barton; he has left Leonce on account of some business, no doubt relative to the intended nuptials. The next time I see M. de Mondville will probably be when I sign his contract as the relation of his future wife. My Louisa, to me the appearance of Leonce has been like a dream, which will soon vanish from my memory, without producing any change on the happiness of my life. Who thinks of the impression he has made upon me? Surely neither he himself, nor any body else. But come, I must not enlarge farther on this subject.

Besides, I have been busily employed to-day, in consequence of the arrival of Theresa. M. de Serbellane came to my house this morning, to tell me she has come; he was much dejected, and in spite of the habit he has acquired of concealing his emotions, his eyes were sometimes filled with tears. He entreated me, in the most earnest manner, to go and see Mad. d'Ervin. "Alas!" said he, "she will destroy herself! so violently is her mind distracted by love and remorse, that she is ready every moment to betray herself before her husband; a man the most irritable and the most violent. If she would consent to fly with me from his presence, there would be something reasonable even in the extravagance of her passion; but by a lamentable inconsistency, religion has no less power over her than love; and her weak and

susceptible heart is exposed to all the dangers of the most opposite feelings. One day she could acknowledge her fault to her husband, and the next, poison herself if he should separate us. Unhappy, interesting woman! why have I ever known her?"—"I will go and see her," said I; "her friendly cares preserved my life; and shall I do nothing to promote her happiness?" I went to Mad. d'Ervins; the poor creature threw herself into my arms with tears in her eyes. I had never before seen her husband, and his appearance confirmed the opinion I had been led to form of him. He received me with politeness, but with an air of importance, which made me feel not the value which he set upon me, but that which he attached to himself. He invited me to breakfast, during which the conversation was forced and constrained, as it must always be with a man who has no just sentiments on any subject, and whose talents are wholly exerted to gratify his self-love. He spoke to me continually of himself, without considering in the least whether the interest which I felt corresponded with the liveliness of his own. When he had any thing to say which he thought sprightly, his little eyes sparkled with a joy which he could not conceal; he looked at me after he had spoken, to judge if I had been able to understand him; and when his selfish doubts were satisfied, he resumed an affected air of gravity, as if afraid he had descended from the proper dignity of his character, anxious at one time to display his wit, and at another to appear as a man of consequence, and secretly afraid of being too playful to be serious, or of being too serious to be agreeable.

After an hour devoted to breakfast, he rose and explained to me deliberately, that some affairs of indispensable necessity, which motives of benevolence had engaged him to undertake, and some visits to great men, whom he could not disappoint without the fear of offending them extremely, obliged him to leave me. I observed that he bestowed on me a look of complacency, as if to soften the regret which he thought I must feel at his absence. I was inclined to undeceive him on this point, but not wishing to displease the husband of my friend, I returned his compliments with all the gravity he desired; and the manner in which he took leave of me, proved that he was not dissatisfied with my behaviour.

When left alone with Theresa, I tried every argument which reason and friendship could suggest, to induce her to submit to prudent advice; but, when all my endeavours were succeeded only by tears and complaints, and feeble resolutions, which were no sooner formed than they were instantly abandoned, my heart was wrung with pity for her melancholy state. She has not received that cultivated education which would enable her to reflect upon her own character; she was

ushered into life with a mind possessed of warm feelings, and imbued with the precepts of a superstitious faith; her reading, I believe, has been wholly confined to romances, and the lives of the saints; she knows only the martyrs of love and devotion; and it is impossible to tear her from her lover, without delivering her up to all the excesses of the most gloomy repentance. The fear of losing the sight of M. de Serbellane is the only consideration capable of restraining her; if she were obliged to separate from him, she would reveal every thing to her husband. She is far from being destitute of natural understanding, but it serves to no other purpose but to enable her to find out reasons for justifying her conduct. She loves her daughter, but is incapable of employing herself with the care of her education. The poor child, seeing her mother constantly in tears, is kept in a perpetual state of tender solicitude, which weakens both her moral and physical powers; and M. d'Ervin, in the midst of all these scenes, never entertains the slightest suspicion. When he surprises his wife and his daughter in tears, he asks their pardon for being so little in their company, for spending so much of his time in his study, or in the society of his friends, and promises never to leave them in future. This blindness might have continued in the retirement of the country, but at Paris how many people will he meet with, who will be disposed to open his eyes, from a desire to humble his foolish pride, or to provoke his irritable temper.

I have represented to Theresa the dreadful situation to which she must be reduced, if she draw upon herself the fury and the despotism of her husband. What would become of her, without relations, without fortune, and without support? She tells me that in this case it is her design to shut herself up in a convent for the rest of her days; and if I hint to her that it would be better, perhaps, for M. de Serbellane to go and remain some time in Portugal, with one of his relations, according to the plan he laid down when he left Italy, the very idea throws her into a frenzy of despair, which makes me tremble. Ah! Louisa, what anguish can be compared with the pangs of love!—Poor Theresa! while listening to her, my thoughts were not wholly occupied with the object before me; they were sometimes turned on Leonce, and the miseries which I myself might have to endure. What succour could I derive from a mind more enlightened than that of Theresa? Passion turns all our resources against ourselves: but let me banish these foreboding fears; it is of my unhappy friend that I ought to think. Heaven, as a recompense, will perhaps watch over my destiny.

M. d'Ervin returned, and M. de Serbellane came in a few moments after. Theresa detained us. I observed with plea-

sure, that during the rest of the day M. de Serbellane did not seek to attach himself to M. d'Ervin. The easier it was to gain the favour of such a man by flattering his vanity, the more I was pleased with the friend of Theresa for not becoming the friend of her husband. There are situations which may render it necessary for us to conceal our real sentiments; but nothing, except the vilest degeneracy of character, can make us capable of expressing a regard which we do not feel.

My esteem, therefore, for M. de Serbellane was increased by the coldness of his behaviour to M. d'Ervin. He interested me still more by the constant solicitude which he discovered to guard against the imprudence of Theresa. She blushed, and grew pale by turns, whenever Portugal was mentioned. M. de Serbellane immediately turned the conversation to some other subject, and thus saved Theresa from discovering her weakness, without at the same time wounding her feelings, by showing himself indifferent to her love. I was much alarmed at the situation in which I found her; I took her aside before leaving her, and made her remark the delicacy which appeared in the conduct of her friend, and the folly of her own. "I know it," replied she, "he is the best and the most generous of men. I am no doubt very troublesome to him; I should do better at once to deliver those who love me from their anxiety on my account, to go and throw myself at the feet of M. d'Ervin, and acknowledge my errors." While she uttered these words, her looks were disordered. I was afraid she would immediately put her design in execution. I locked her in my arms, and entreated her to give me her promise that she would leave herself entirely to my direction.

"Listen to me," said she: "I am haunted with a fear, which, I believe, is the principal cause of the disorder in which you see me. I am persuaded in my own mind that he will think it incumbent on him to leave me without letting me know his intention, or that my husband will unexpectedly separate me from him, before I have an opportunity of bidding him adieu. If you will obtain from M. de Serbellane an oath that he will not depart without previously informing me, and if you will pledge your word that, whatever may happen, you will assist me in effecting an interview for one hour only, one short hour, before I quit him for ever, then I shall be more tranquil: I shall not think with myself, every time he speaks to me, these are the last words I shall ever hear from him; I shall not be perpetually harassed with the thoughts of all my heart would yet tell him: my mind will be at ease."—"Well then," replied I, with warmth, "this very moment you shall be satisfied." M. d'Ervin was speaking to a man who listened to him with the most respectful condescension. He was not thinking of us. I called M. de Serbellane, and received his

solemn promise that he would do as Theresa desired. I at the same time gave her the strongest assurances that I should find means somehow to bring about a parting interview with M. de Serbellane, if ever M. d'Ervin should forbid her to see him any more. In giving this promise, I felt some apprehensions about the consequences, I know not how; but I am certain that before I knew Leonce I never would have once thought that such an engagement could at any time expose me to censure. I applauded myself, in the mean time, for having taken it, when I found how much it had restored the drooping spirits of Theresa. She heard me with resignation, when I spoke of the circumstances which might render it necessary for M. de Serbellane to take his departure, and when I left her, she seemed perfectly composed.

I did not go in the evening to Mad. de Vernon's: I was not at liberty to intrust her with the secret of Theresa's unfortunate love. I could not speak to her of Leonce; and how is it possible to converse with an intimate friend, and not to communicate the ideas that are predominant in the mind? This would be to discourse with a friend as with a person who held no place in our hearts; to seek out subjects of conversation, instead of abandoning ourselves to those with which the imagination is occupied; and to be on our guard, if I may use the expression, against the ideas and the sentiments with which the soul is ready to overflow. I thought it better not to see Mad. de Vernon.

As for you, my dear Louisa, from whom I do not wish to conceal my most secret thoughts, I never feel the least constraint in communicating my sentiments to you. With you I examine my own conduct; I appoint you the judge of my heart; and my conscience never tells me any thing of which I leave you ignorant.

## LETTER XXIII.

### DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

I HAVE seen him, my dear sister, I have seen him once more: no, it is no longer pity which I feel for him, he has inspired me with esteem, with admiration, with all the sentiments which would have ensured the happiness of my life. Alas! what have I done! By what indissoluble ties of friendship and mutual confidence have I bound myself? But what are his sentiments? what are his wishes? Could he be forced to

marry my cousin, should he not be able to bestow his affections on her, if——. With what vain sophisms do I seek to buoy up my hopes! if he should break off his marriage with Matilda, would it not be from a preference to me? I should have the appearance of having encouraged his addresses by my munificence, and I should be said to have seduced him from his former engagements! I am richer than Matilda; it might be believed that I had made an improper use of this advantage; and, above all, I should wound the feelings of Mad. de Vernon. She would accuse me of a want of delicacy, she whose esteem is so necessary to my happiness! But to what purpose is all this reasoning; does Leonce love me? If he did, could he disengage himself from the promise given by his mother? You shall judge presently to what slender proofs I have trusted, in order to discover his sentiments. Alas! too happy day, the first, and perhaps the last of this life of enchantment, which the marvellous power of sensibility has taught me to enjoy for some hours!

M. de Mondeville was announced yesterday at Mad. de Vernon's; he was less pale than when I first saw him, but his figure still preserved that interesting appearance which before so tenderly affected me, and the return of his strength heightened whatever there is noble and serious in the expression of his countenance. He saluted me first; and I felt proud at this proof of his regard, as if the most inconsiderable marks of favour pointed out to each individual his rank in society. Mad. de Vernon presented him to Matilda; she blushed; I thought her sufficiently handsome: but, Louisa, I am certain that when Leonce, after having observed her with a good deal of indifference, turned towards me, his looks then only assumed their natural sensibility. M. Barton was seated beside me on the terrace in the garden, Leonce came to place himself near him; Mad. de Vernon asked him to pass the evening with her, and he accepted of the invitation.

At this moment my mind settled at once into the most pleasing tranquillity; there were three hours before me, during all which time I was certain of seeing him; his health no longer gave me any uneasiness, and there was nothing to disturb me but a too lively feeling of my own happiness. I conversed a long time with him, in his presence, and on his account; the pleasure which I received from this conversation was entirely new to me; till this time I had never considered conversation in any other view, but as a method by which I might show the ingenuity or the extent of my ideas, but in the company of Leonce I sought for subjects which more immediately concern the affections and the heart: we talked of romances, we ran over all those successively which have laid open the secret griefs of characters distinguished for their sen-

sibility. I felt an emotion within me which animated all my discourse: my heart did not cease to beat a single moment, even when our discussion became purely literary; my mind possessed all its freedom and all its readiness, but I felt myself agitated, as if the occasion had been one of the most important in my life, and in the evening I could not persuade myself but that some extraordinary event had happened around me.

Every word which fell from Leonce heightened my esteem and my admiration. His manner of expressing himself was concise but energetic; and even when he made use of language the most forcible and eloquent, it appeared to convey only the half of what he felt, and there seemed to remain, at the bottom of his heart, treasures of sentiment and passion which he refused to lavish. With what promptitude, with what interest, did he stoop to listen when I spoke! No, I cannot form, in my imagination, the idea of a more delightful situation; the thoughts arising from the exertions of intellect, the emotions excited by the gratification of self-love, changed into the enjoyment of the heart. Oh! what happy moments! why should life be ever deprived of them!

I observed, in the mean time, that Matilda, by her looks and her gestures, showed a good deal of displeasure. Mad. de Vernon, who generally takes delight in talking with me, spoke to the person who sat next her, without seeming at all interested in our conversation; she at last took Mad. de Marsey by the arm, and said to her, loud enough to let me hear—"Will you not play, madam! their conversation is too fine for us."—I blushed extremely at these words; I rose to tell them that I would also be of the party; Leonce reproached me by his looks. M. Barton came towards me, and said, with a good nature which charmed me—"I almost thought, madam, I heard you speak to-day for the first time; never did the charms of your conversation strike me so forcibly. Oh! how delightful was it to be praised in the presence of Leonce! He sighed and supported himself on the chair which he had just left. M. Barton said to him in a half whisper—"Will you not go up to Mademoiselle de Vernon?"—"For heaven sake, leave me where I am!" replied Leonce.—I heard these words, Louisa, and the accent which accompanied them shall never be forgotten.

When the party was arranged, Leonce, left almost alone with Matilda, went to speak to her, but their conversation appeared to me cold and embarrassed. Mad. de Marsey took a good deal of interest in the game; I did not know all the time what I was doing: Mad. de Vernon excused my faults with the most charming goodness; she was perfectly agreeable during this party, and I was so captivated with her behaviour, that I went no more near Leonce; I thought that the good-na-



ture of Mad. de Vernon required this of me. She wished to detain me for the purpose of conversing with her alone, but I refused to stay. I do not wish to conceal my sentiments from her: if she discover them, I shall not be displeased; perhaps I even wish that she may do so, but I cannot bring myself to the resolution of speaking to her first. Would not this be to point out the sacrifice which I wish her to make? If she had laid me under obligations, then I could use more freedom with her; I would frankly acknowledge my folly, and throw myself upon her generosity; but I am anxious, above every thing, to avoid taking the least advantage of the services I have been able to render her.

Consult, my dear sister, the delicacy of your own feelings, and not the prejudices which you entertain against Mad. de Vernon, and tell me what I ought to do if he should love me, if he should think himself at liberty to dispose of his affections. Alas! your advice will perhaps be unnecessary; perhaps I dread the difficulty of a trial to which he will never subject me.

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## LETTER XXIV.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON, AT MONDEVILLE.

Paris, June 6.

You have gone to Mondeville in compliance with the respect conveyed in a second letter from my mother; I beg, my dear Barton, that you will remain there for some time. Your stay will serve me as a pretext for delaying all explanation with Mad. de Vernon with regard to my marriage, and will give me an opportunity of writing to my mother, and perhaps of finding some new means to deliver myself from the promise she has given. I believe you are sensible of it yourself, my dear friend, though you have refused to declare your opinion to me. I know Mad. d'Albemar, and I can never love Matilda.

Do you suppose that the impression which my heart received yesterday can ever be effaced? Matilda is undoubtedly handsome; you have told me so; I believe it; but is she the only woman I have seen? Yesterday, I saw, I listened to a woman, and such a woman as never before existed. If ever a human being was inspired, it is Delphine. Did you observe her while she was speaking to me? I was seated a few steps from her in the garden: her voice was animated; her ravishing

eyes looked up to heaven, as if to call it to bear witness to the sublimity of her thoughts; her fine arms were placed naturally, in a manner the most easy, and the most elegant. The wind often blew her fair locks over her face; she removed them with a grace, with a negligence, which lent new charms to all her emotions. Do you believe, my dear Barton, that she was more deeply interested in the conversation because I was present? You told me, that you never before saw her so agreeable: did she wish to please me? Yet she left me so hastily! but this may be accounted for from her fear of distressing Mad. de Vernon. Oh! it is beyond a doubt, our souls would understand each other, if I were free from restraint, if I were at liberty to express, with all its force, what I feel and what I think! but it will be long before I can speak with freedom; and will she be able, amidst all my reserve, to guess the secrets of my heart? will she, whose greatest charm consists in the absence of all disguise, believe that there are sentiments which I conceal within my own breast? and will she discover that they prey upon the heart which cherishes them?

I did not think it possible, my dear Barton, that in the same person there could be united so various and so many charms, that it would seem they could only belong to beings whose nature is altogether different. Language always select, and thoughts always natural, liveliness of imagination, and tenderness of sentiment, elevation and simplicity, sweetness and energy! Adorable union of genius and candour, of softness and strength! possessing, in the same degree, every thing that can excite the admiration of the profoundest intellect, every thing that is calculated to please the most ordinary understanding, if it be accompanied with goodness of heart, if it love to find this interesting quality under all the forms of ease and dignity, of captivating grace and amiable simplicity.

Delphine enlivens the conversation by exciting an interest in what she says, and by attending with interest to what she hears from another; she has no high pretensions, she feels no constraint; she has a desire to please, but she does not wish to succeed in her object by any other means than by discovering the perfections which nature hath given her. All the women I have ever seen before, seemed to arm themselves, more or less, with studied graces, in order to produce an effect upon those around them: Delphine alone has sufficient courage and sufficient simplicity to think that she will be the more agreeable, the more freedom she gives to the display of her natural feelings.

With what enthusiasm does she speak of the charms of virtue! She loves it as the fairest object in the moral world; she breathes only what is good, like a pure atmosphere, the

only one in which her generous soul can live. If the extent of her understanding inspires her with independence of character, she yet stands in need of support. There is in her appearance something delicate and timorous, which seems to call for protection against the calamities of life; and her soul is not made to resist alone the vicissitudes of fortune. O my friend! what will be the happiness of that man, whom she shall choose to be the guardian of her happiness, whom she shall raise to a level with herself, and who shall defend her against the villany of mankind!

You see it is no slight impression which I have received; I have observed Delphine, I have judged her, I know her; my heart is no longer free. I am going to write to my mother; only promise, my dear Barton, that you will contrive incidents which may detain you for a month at Mondeville.

P. S. I have this moment received a letter from Spain, which gives me much uneasiness. My mother informs me, that Mad. du Marset, who you know often writes to her, has given her to understand, that Mademoiselle de Vernon has a cousin of uncommon talents, but singularly skeptical in her principles and in her conduct, an enthusiast in her opinions upon the politics of the day, &c. and whose society is by no means proper for me. My mother advises me to have no connexion with Mademoiselle d'Albemar: she has been led into an absurd prejudice, which I shall certainly find some means to remove. In the mean time I feel the utmost indignation against Mad. du Marset, and I shall seize the earliest opportunity to let her feel it.

## LETTER XXV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

HE has spoken to me, my dear friend, with the deepest interest, with the most unreserved freedom! How much I felt myself honoured! Listen to me: this day some events have happened, in addition to those you already know, which may serve to hasten the decision of my fate.

I dined at Mad. de Vernon's with Mad. du Marset and her inseparable friend M. de Fierville; I know not by what accident it happened, but at the very hour at which Leonce is ac-

customed to come to Mad. de Vernon's, she led the conversation to political occurrences. Mad. du Marset inveighed against all that is great and noble in the love of liberty, in language applicable only to the misfortunes which revolutions necessarily produce. I allowed her to speak for a considerable time, without attempting to oppose her; but some witticisms, which M. de Fierville threw out against an Englishman who was refuting the absurdities of Mad. du Marset, put me out of all patience. M. de Fierville always supports the foolish observations of his friend, by turning into ridicule every thing of a serious nature that may be advanced, whatever happens to be the subject; and frightens those who are not sufficiently confident in their own abilities, by telling them that whoever is not a wit must necessarily be a pedant. I felt a strong propensity to assist the Englishman, who has lately arrived in France, and who was intimidated by this stratagem, and I entered, in spite of myself, into the discussion.

Mad. du Marset has stored her memory with some abusive expressions against Rousseau, which she retails whenever any person chooses to provoke her: Mad. de Vernon provoked her, and I replied with a good deal of contempt. Mad. du Marset, thinking herself offended, turned to Mad. de Vernon, and said to her—"I assure you, madam, whatever your niece may say, this opinion, which she thinks so ridiculous, is not mine only; Mad. de Mondeville, to whom I wrote again yesterday upon what is passing in France, thinks exactly as I do." The moment I heard that Mad. du Marset was in the habit of corresponding with Mad. de Mondeville, it occurred to me, that she might perhaps have spoken to her of me; that she would probably relate to her the very conversation which had just happened, and that she would represent me as a mad creature to Mad. de Mondeville, who is particularly violent in her hatred against the French revolution. I felt such a sudden alarm in consequence of this reflection, that it was impossible for me to add a single word more.

Mad. du Marset said to me, with that smile which characterizes self-love, when its object is to feign an assurance which it does not possess—"Well, madam, do you make no reply? Have I stumbled by accident upon the truth? have I reduced you to silence, with all your mighty genius?" Leonce was announced. How I wished that this fatal conversation might not be renewed! But Mad. de Vernon, without any pity, called M. de Mondeville, and said to him—"Is it true that your mother hates Rousseau? Mad. d'Albemar, who is an enthusiastical admirer both of his writings and his political opinions, defends him against Mad. du Marset, who appeals to the sentiments of your mother."

I trembled at this discourse, and waited without drawing

my breath for the answer of Leonce. At the mention of Mad. du Marset, he immediately turned towards her; I did not see his face, but there was in the attitude of his head something which expressed contempt for Mad. du Marset, and I felt my courage instantly renewed. Mad. du Marset, who received the look of Leonce full in the face, was no doubt moved by it, for she uttered the following words in a feeble voice:—"Yes, sir, your mother is absolutely of my opinion; she has written to me repeatedly to that effect."—"I do not know, madam," said Leonce to her, in a tone of voice which I did not recognise to be his, but which struck me with awe and respect; "I do not know what my mother has written to you, but I should wish to be ignorant of your answer."—"Let us lay aside all this," said Mad. de Vernon, somewhat hastily, "and walk in the garden."

I wished extremely to procure an explanation of the words of Leonce; I delighted myself with the hope that his anger proceeded from his regard for me; but I wanted him to tell me so himself. I remained, without any object, a few paces behind in the walk; I thought I saw Leonce hesitate for a moment: however, he plucked a leaf from the same tree from which I was plucking one, and I then began the conversation.

"Do I not owe you some acknowledgments," said I, "for the assistance you have given me?"—"I shall always be happy to defend you, madam," replied he, "even though I should take the liberty to disapprove of your conduct."—"And what wrong have I done then?" said I to him with a good deal of emotion. "Why, lovely Delphine," replied he, "why do you support opinions which awaken so many hateful passions, and from which persons of your sex are, perhaps, without reason, placed at so great a distance?" For the first time, my dear Louisa, I recollected that letter to M. Barton, which I had entirely forgotten from the time I saw Leonce; the accent of his voice, the expression of his figure, recalled it to my memory; and I replied to him with more coldness, perhaps, than I would have done, but for this recollection. "Sir," said I, "it is unbecoming in a woman to take any part in political disputes; her destiny places her beyond the reach of the dangers with which they are attended, and her actions can never give importance or dignity to her words; but if you wish to know what I think, I will not be afraid to tell you, that of all sentiments, the love of liberty appears to me the most worthy of a generous character."—"You have misunderstood me," replied Leonce, with a look somewhat softened, and not without a mixture of sorrow; "it was not my intention to enter into any discussion with you on the propriety of opinions, with regard to which the character of my mother, and, if you will,

the prejudices and the manners of the country in which I was educated, do not allow me to entertain any doubt: I should only wish to know, whether it be true, that you often indulge yourself in declaring your sentiments on this subject, and that no consideration of interest can prevent you from doing so? These questions may appear very indiscreet, and very improper; but I give you credit for that superior understanding which can discover my motives in whatever obscurity they may be involved: you ought therefore to pardon me."

This last word called forth all my confidence; and, yielding to the impulse of this emotion, I said to him, with a good deal of warmth, "I solemnly assure you, sir, that I have never taken any part in defence of these opinions, except what I have been induced to take by the current of conversation; it insensibly leads us to lay open our sentiments on any subject: that sort of conversation frequently recurs in the present day, and I have sometimes yielded to the interest which it inspires; but if I had possessed any friends who attached the least importance to my silence, it is a favour which they might easily have obtained."

Is it possible that a woman can be powerfully swayed by interests which can lay no hold on the affections of the heart, or which can in no manner be connected with them? If I had a brother, a husband, a friend, or a father, who acted a distinguished part in public affairs, then my whole soul might be devoted to such objects; but the associations which I form, and which are wholly abstracted from selfish views, convince my understanding without touching my heart. I am free from every tie; my unpropitious fate has destined me to be free; there is no one to claim any duty from me; my opinions cannot influence the happiness of any one; my words have always expressed the thoughts which my mind suggested: it would have given greater happiness to be silent, if by this slight sacrifice I could have given pleasure to any human being."—"What," said he, with inexpressible softness, "if you had a friend who desired you to join the society of his mother, who dreaded every thing that might oppose her wishes, would you comply with his advice?"—"Yes," replied I, "friendship would go much farther than such a compliance."

He took my hand, and, after having raised it to his lips, before quitting it he pressed it upon his heart. Ah! this movement appeared to me the sweetest, the most tender of all: it was not the simple homage of gallantry.

Leonce would not have pressed my hand upon his noble heart, had he not wished to appeal to it as a witness of the ardour of his affection. We then quitted each other as if by mutual consent: I wished to retain in my soul the impression

which it had just received, and I dreaded to hear a single word more even from him.

We were both silent during the rest of the evening. Mad. de Vernon detained me after all the company had retired; I thought she was going to put some questions to me. Although I should have wished to delay for some days the avowal which I could no longer withhold, I was determined not to conceal from her the feelings which agitated my bosom; but she appeared either to be ignorant of them, or to be desirous of checking the confidence that I wished to repose in her; and employing a method more cruel and more refined, she perhaps expected to bend my heart to her purpose, by the very security which she seemed to maintain. She applauded herself for the choice she had made of Leonce to be the husband of her daughter, and joining me with herself in every thing she said, she repeated several times the words—"We have secured her happiness; we have——." We!—alas! how ill did this word accord with my present feelings!

She reminded me several times, that it was to me only that she owed the establishment of her daughter. She recalled to my mind all the services I had rendered her on former occasions; and, returning to the mention of Matilda, she spoke to me of the defects of her character with more confidence than ever she had done before.

"I am sensible," said she, "although her beauty is striking, she could never contend with advantage against a woman who would study to please; she would not even discover the efforts which another made to deprive her of the man whom she loved, and still less could she practise the arts necessary to retain his affections. If you had not ensured her happiness by the generous sacrifices which you have made, no man would ever have married her from inclination; she could not have flattered herself with the hopes of ever obtaining a husband of the fortune and character of Leonce."—"Why," said I to her, "might not another have united similar advantages almost in the same degree? This nephew of M. de Fierville, to whom you once thought——."—"I did not know Leonce then," interrupted she; "how can a mother compare these two men when she thinks of the happiness of her daughter? Besides, the nephew of M. de Fierville has lost the law-suit which was at first determined in his favour; he is now reduced to nothing: a very large sum is owing to Mad. de Mondeville; and as I cannot pay it unless this marriage takes place, I shall be ruined if it fail. Do not seek, my dear, to diminish the merit of the service which you render me; it is invaluable, and the whole happiness of my life depends upon it."

I threw myself into the arms of Mad. de Vernon; I was

going to speak, but she interrupted me hastily, by telling me that her lawyer had this morning brought her the deed, by which I was to give over the estate of Audelys, accurately made out according to our agreement; and she begged me to sign it, that every thing might be properly arranged, before the drawing up of the contract betwixt Leonce and Matilda. At these words I felt my blood grow cold; but a new emotion succeeding almost as instantaneously as the former, I felt myself ashamed to lay open my sentiments to Mad. de Vernon, at the very moment when I was going to bind myself to the fulfilment of the promise which I had given, and I was afraid thus to expose myself to the suspicion of wishing to retract.

I rose, therefore, to follow her into her closet: happening to pass before a mirror, I was struck with the paleness which I observed on my countenance, and I stopped for some moments; but at last I triumphed over my reluctance; I took up the pen, and signed my name with the greatest promptitude, for I was extremely afraid lest I should betray myself; and, notwithstanding all my efforts, I cannot conceive why Mad. de Vernon did not discover my agitation. I took leave of her almost immediately; I wished to be alone, that I might reflect upon what I had done. Mad. de Vernon did not attempt to detain me, nor did she express the least uneasiness at the dreadful state in which I was.

When I entered my own house, I trembled; I felt a secret dread, as if I had placed an insuperable barrier betwixt Leonce and me: I reflected, however, that the estate which I had just disposed of to Matilda might serve equally well to facilitate another marriage, if she could be brought to consent to it. Another marriage! Alas! can I persuade myself that there is a man in the world who can console any woman for the loss of Leonce? What art has not Mad. de Vernon employed to bind my heart to those ties of delicacy and sensibility which are intertwined with our whole frame! How would she be astonished if I did not answer to her confidence! She has the appearance of utterly rejecting any such fear! Ah! if she would only suspect me! But nothing can induce her to do this: it will be requisite to speak to her, it will be absolutely requisite, and I am resolved upon it. Must I sacrifice every thing, and ought she to be ignorant of what it costs me? But the first word that I utter shall tell her all—What grief will it give me to pronounce it!



## LETTER XXVI.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

June 20.

You are indeed very dangerous to my peace, my dear Louisa; I requested you to encourage and support me amid those severe trials to which I am exposed, and you write me a letter in return, in which you carefully point out to me all those motives which my own heart have easily suggested to induce me to yield, without restraint, to the sentiments I feel. You wish to persuade me that Matilda will experience no unhappiness from the loss of Leonce: you remind me that Mad. de Vernon was disposed to make a choice elsewhere when the life of Leonce was supposed to be in danger. You pretend that I have done enough for my friend already, by lending her at once forty thousand livres, and in securing, by my own generosity, the fortune of her daughter: but you do not like Mad. de Vernon, and can form no estimate of the affection I have for her. The sensible and animated pleasure which I have always received from her temper and disposition would render me inconsolable, were I to be guilty of any thing that could give her uneasiness. I have loved her since I was fifteen; I owe to her the happiest moments of my life, every thing that engages most strongly the sentiments and feelings of my soul. I have been long accustomed to regard her happiness as preferable to my own: it appeared to me that my depressed and melancholy mind was destined to suffer, but that I should preserve at least from pain the happy and tranquil being who intrusted her destiny to my friendship. Must I lose six years of memory and affection for this new and temporary feeling, which will, perhaps, be dissipated on the first moment of knowing Leonce's character? I am even already afraid you should be convinced of this by what I am now going to tell you.

Theresa yesterday was more distressed than ever: M. d'Ervin's has received an idea that the political opinions of M. de Serbellane are very dangerous, and that it was improper for a supporter of the court to preserve an intimacy with a man of such a character. He receives him therefore very coldly, and almost never invites him to his house. Theresa is in despair, and has requested me to promise to receive M. de Serbellane and her every day at my house. I have denied this request—I cannot countenance a connexion so contrary

to her duty. I will give her all the assistance in my power, that can possibly have a tendency to sooth her affliction, but only on condition that she return to the path of discretion and virtue. I will not obstruct the kind assistances which a benevolent Providence affords her. She listened to my remonstrances with good nature, and only reminded me of the promise I had made, should M. de Serbellane be under a necessity to depart. I confirmed this promise, and felt myself embarrassed at appearing so cruelly severe. Alas! have I a right to be so? Theresa soon became more tranquil, after having described to me all those painful and uneasy sentiments which agitated her bosom. She did not know the pain and anxiety she made me feel: in a low voice I said a few soothing and consolatory words; but I felt myself more inclined to throw myself into her arms, to mingle my own sorrows with hers, and to abandon ourselves together to the expression of those feelings which I was so anxious to relieve. I restrained myself, however;—it was my duty; it was necessary I should still support her, though with a weak and irresolute hand.

After mid-day M. de Serbellane called upon me: he spoke of Theresa; and it is always impossible for me to witness, without the most sensible emotion, the regard and friendship of a brother, and the delicacy and affection of a lover, which unite so feelingly in his character. He had something yet more important to communicate to me; but I was under the necessity of going at a certain hour to the concert which was given by Mad. de Vernon; he therefore proposed accompanying me. I have several times made visits with M. de Serbellane. You know I never have been accustomed to give myself the smallest concern about those affected punctilios of society, to which one may so easily conform, if she has not really any interest to dissemble her conduct; but it occurred to me that I might perhaps offend Leonce by coming in company with a young man, and I made some hesitation. M. de Serbellane observed it, and said to me—"You do not wish, I perceive, to go along with me." I was ashamed of my embarrassment; I did not know what colour to give to this appearance of prudery, which is so unbecoming a natural character; and being neither able to tell the truth, nor willing to be suspected of affectation, I received the hand which M. de Serbellane presented me, and we set out together.

I was in expectation that Leonce would not yet have got to Mad. de Vernon's, but he was there before us. Upon entering the court-yard, I observed his carriage—one of M. de Serbellane's friends detained him on the staircase; I entered therefore some minutes before him, and flattered myself I had avoided the suspicion I was so apprehensive of; but the very

moment M. de Serbellane entered, Mad. de Vernon, I know not by what accident, asked him, quite aloud, if we had not come together. He answered very naturally that we had. On hearing this Leonce started up: he looked by turns at M. de Serbellane and me, with an expression of feature the most dissatisfied and severe, and for some moments I was uncertain if I had not every thing to fear. M. de Serbellane, I am certain, observed Leonce's anger, and wishing to favour my situation, negligently took his seat beside another lady, with whom he affected to be very much engaged.

Leonce went and seated himself at the other end of the room, and immediately fixed his eyes on me with an air of disdain. I was extremely provoked, and this sentiment would have supported me, had not a mortal paleness, suddenly overspreading his countenance, brought to my recollection the condition in which he was when I first saw him. The remembrance of so deep and affecting an impression soon disarmed my resentment. Leonce perceived that I looked at him; he turned away his head, and appeared to make some efforts to recover his spirits.

Matilda sung very well, but without feeling. Leonce paid her no compliments: the concert continued without his appearing to hear it, and without relaxing for a moment the stern and gloomy expression of his features. For my own part, I was overwhelmed with melancholy: your letter, I confess, had weakened a good deal the idea which suggested to me the obstacles that must necessarily prevent my union with Leonce. I had gone with this pleasing thought, and Leonce, on my first entrance, presenting to me all the unfavourable parts of his character, seemed to create new obstacles that more positively than ever forbade our union. Perhaps he was jealous; perhaps he blamed, from the excess of his prejudices on this subject, a conduct which appeared to him giddy and inconstant. Both might be true, but I could find no opportunity for an explanation.

At the end of the concert every body rose. I twice attempted to converse with those who were in company with Leonce; and twice he quitted the party to whom I advanced, and withdrew in order to avoid me. My indignation had again taken possession of me, and I was preparing to depart, when Mad. de Vernon, addressing some ladies who still remained, invited them to the ball, which she said she proposed to give her daughter on the Friday following, in honour of the recovery of M. de Mondeville. Judge of the effect these last words produced on my mind; I really believed it was to be the nuptial feast; that Leonce had positively explained himself; and that the day was now fixed.—I was obliged to support myself on a chair, and had nearly fainted. Leonce looked at

me with fixed attention, and raising his eyes instantaneously in a kind of transport, he advanced to the circle, and pronounced these words with an accent and voice that were distinct and animated:—"One might very well be astonished at the kindness which Mad. de Vernon expresses for me, were it not known that my mother is her most intimate friend, and that on this account only she is anxious to interest herself in my welfare."—When he had concluded these words, I began to breathe; I understood him; I was again myself. Mad. de Vernon, smiling, said, with her usual grace and presence of mind—"Since M. de Mondeville does not wish my interest on his own account, I will then say that it is entirely on account of his mother; but I persist at the same time in the invitation I have given to the ball.

The company took their leave, and a few only staid supper. The nephew of Mad. de Marset, who has a tolerably good voice, asked me to accompany Matilda and him in that *trio* in Dido of which your brother was so passionately fond.—I declined it; but Leonce spoke a word only, and I immediately accepted. Matilda took her seat at the piano with a good deal of complaisance; she has acquired more sweetness in her manner since she has seen Leonce, without its having produced any other change. They prescribed to me the part of Dido: Leonce sat down opposite to us, leaning upon the piano. I could scarcely articulate the first sounds; but, upon looking at Leonce, I thought I saw in his countenance its natural expression, and every energy of my soul was awaked when I came to these words in a melody so affecting:

Thou know'st the passion that pervades my soul;  
 Oh! cease to give me pain:  
 Thou know'st the feelings that my heart control;  
 Why doom me to complain?

The beauty of this air, and the palpitation of my heart, communicated, I am persuaded, to every accent of my voice an emotion, the exact copy of the passion I described. Leonce, my dear Leonce, reclined his head on the piano: I perceived his agitation from the difficulty of his breathing, while sometimes he raised his face, all bathed in tears, in order to look at me. Never, never did I feel myself so much elevated; I discovered in the music, in the poetry, charms and a power that was entirely new to me. It appeared to me that an enthusiasm for the fine arts had taken possession of my soul for the first time of my existence; and I experienced an enchantment, an elevation of mind, of which love was the first and

immediate cause, but which was even more sacred than love itself.

When we had finished the air, Leonce, struggling with emotion, went down into the garden to conceal his feelings. He remained there a considerable time, till I began to be alarmed; but as nobody spoke of him, I durst not begin; even to mention his name appeared to me to be sufficient to betray myself. Happily, it struck the nephew of Mad. du Marset to show us his skill in astronomy; he advanced to the terrace to point out the stars to us, and I eagerly followed him. Leonce returned; he seized me by the hand without being perceived, and said to me with the greatest eagerness—"No, you do not love M. de Serbellane: you did not sing for him, it was not at him you looked."—"No, certainly," exclaimed I, "I call heaven to witness my heart!" Mad. de Vernon immediately interrupted us. I know not if she heard what I said; but I was resolved to confess the whole to him; I was no longer afraid of any thing.

We returned to the drawing-room—Leonce was remarkably cheerful; never did I witness so much gaiety and expansion of mind: it was impossible not to discover, in him the joy of a man just relieved from excessive pain. His disposition became mine; we contrived a thousand pleasantries: we felt, both of us, an inward satisfaction, which required expansion and indulgence. He made, with some point, though indirectly, some epigrams upon what he called my philosophy, the independence of my conduct, my contempt for the customs of the world: but he was happy; and there seemed to exist between us that delightful familiarity which is the best and most decisive proof of mutual affection. I felt as if we had explained ourselves, as if every obstacle were removed, and every oath pronounced of affection and fidelity, though, at the same time, I knew nothing of his designs. We had not yet enjoyed a quarter of an hour's conversation together; but I was certain that he loved me; and nothing then appeared to me uncertain in the world.

I went to Mad. de Vernon, and requested of her an hour's conversation that very night. She excused herself, by saying she was indisposed. I proposed next day; she begged me to postpone, till after the ball, what had I to say to her; she assured me that till that period she had not a moment disengaged. I submitted, though it appeared evident that she studied pretexts to delay this conversation. Whatever she may conjecture on the subject, my resolution is taken; I am determined to speak to her: when she has known all, when I have offered to quit Paris, and to shut myself up for the remainder of my days in some retired and melancholy seclusion, to preserve there, without criminality, the perpetual remem-

brance of Leonce, let her decide my destiny; I will make her alone the arbiter of my fate, and whatever part she may act, I shall no longer, at least, have to blush before her. My dear Louisa, I feel the greater tranquillity, since I do not hesitate to determine the line of conduct which it is my duty to pursue.

## LETTER XXVII.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, June 20.

My fate, my dear friend, is now decided; no other object but Delphine shall ever reign in my heart. Yesterday, at the ball, yesterday she almost exposed herself to censure on my account. Ah! let me thank her for having permitted me to devote my attentions to her! I have no longer any doubt, no longer any uncertainty; I have nothing more to do, but to put my resolution in execution, and I only consult you on the means of doing it with propriety.

On the fourth of July I shall be at Mondeville; we shall concert between us what I should write to my mother. Mad. de Vernon has not yet spoken a word to me of the proposed marriage; on my return from Mondeville, I will take the first opportunity to speak to her on this subject. She is a woman of understanding; she is the friend of Delphine: when she is fully assured of my resolution, she will save herself any farther trouble. I dreaded only the strength of those engagements which might have been formed. My mother has avoided any answer to my letter; she must think her own honour, therefore, not at all interested: had she thought, for a moment, that her honour or delicacy were compromised by my want of obedience, she would not have delayed a single day to send me the most peremptory injunctions. In her letters, she insists only on the pretended failings of Mad. d'Albemar: they have made her believe that she is giddy and imprudent; that she continually endangers her character, and never loses an opportunity to advance opinions the most contrary to those we ought to cherish and respect. It will be your part, my dear Barton, to acquaint my mother with Mad. d'Albemar's real character: she will believe you much sooner than me.

Delphine, without doubt, permits herself to be too much directed by her own natural dispositions, and does not consider

sufficiently the impression which her conduct may make upon others. She has much need to direct her attention to what is called *knowledge* of the world, and to guard herself from that indifference she entertains for public opinion, over which men of moderate talents have at least as much influence as those of superior abilities. It is not improbable, indeed, that we have both faults entirely the reverse of each other: well, we shall allow it to be so! At present I am persuaded that the happiness and virtues of both would be augmented by this very diversity of character. She will submit her actions, I am certain, to my wishes; and her mode of thinking will, perhaps, liberalize mine. She will diminish or modify, at least, that excessive sensibility that has already occasioned me so much suffering. All will be well, my dear friend, if I only can be her husband.

Yesterday, in short. — But how shall I relate to you the feelings of this day! it will again involve my soul in the labyrinth which bewilders and overpowers it. Is there any sentiment valuable but that of love; or any other life desirable in living? There are in my heart so many tender recollections, so many animated ideas of happiness, that I rejoice in my existence every moment I breathe. Alas! what mischief would my enemy have done me, had he killed me! My wound still gives me pain: I am sometimes afraid that it will again open, feelings so impassioned agitate my bosom. Would you, indeed, believe it, that I am afraid of dying before to-morrow, before a single hour, before the very moment when I shall again have the felicity of seeing her?

Do not imagine, however, that I describe to you the love of a thoughtless young man, or that love which it is the duty of a sensible friend to blame. Though you have engaged not to oppose the views of my mother, you wish, notwithstanding, that she would prefer Mad. d'Albemar to Matilda. Yes, my dear friend, your understanding corresponds with the choice of your pupil; do not deny it. Ah! if you knew how much more you were endeared to me on this account!

Before going to Mad. de Vernon's ball, I have received your answer respecting M. de Serbellane. You allowed that he was the man whom Mad. d'Albemar had always appeared to you most to esteem; and although you endeavoured to calm my anxiety, your letter had rather the effect of exciting it anew. I went, therefore, to the ball, in a disposition of mind sufficiently melancholy. Matilda was dressed in a Spanish robe, which remarkably added to the beauty of her shape and figure. She has never expressed any preference for me, but I could not help thinking I saw an amiable design to please me in her choice of this dress. I wished to speak to her, and I seated myself beside her, after having led her nearer the

door by which we entered, to which I was continually directing my eyes. I was so much engrossed by my impatience to see Delphine arrive, that I could not even follow up with Matilda this ball conversation, which is in general so easily conducted.

On a sudden I perceived an agreeable and balmy odour, and immediately recognised the perfume of flowers which Delphine is accustomed to carry. I involuntarily started up. She entered without seeing me; but I did not go immediately towards her; I wished to taste the pleasure for a moment of knowing that she was in the same place with myself. I husbanded, with the anxiety of a voluptuary, the enjoyments of the happiest day of my life. I permitted Delphine to make the circuit of the ball-room before endeavouring to approach her. I observed only that she still sought some person, though every body was eager to surround her. She was dressed in a plain white robe, and her beautiful locks were bound up without any ornament, but with a grace and variety perfectly inimitable. Ah! how indifferent was I, when looking at her, about the fine attire of Matilda! It was that of Delphine only which I could approve and admire. What signify to me emblems calculated to revive the recollections of Spain. Ever since the day on which I saw Mad. d'Albemar, I have been capable only of one recollection.

She observed me in the embrasure of a window, where I had placed myself to look at her. She betrayed an emotion of joy which did not escape me. Immediately after, she perceived Matilda; but her dress struck her so forcibly, that she continued standing before her, surprised and astonished, without being able to speak to her. A young handsome Italian lady, whom they called Mad. d'Ervins, then made up to Delphine, and begged her to follow her into the side saloon. Delphine hesitated, and I am certain it was in order to speak to me. Mad. d'Ervins, however, appeared distressed by her refusal, and Delphine no longer hesitated to comply.

This interview with Mad. d'Ervins lasted pretty long, and I bore it with the utmost impatience, till Delphine returned to me, and said—"It is, perhaps, very ridiculous to give you an account of my actions, without knowing whether you are interested in them: in a word, should you consider this unusual step as imprudent, you will think of my character what you perhaps think of it already, but you will not conceive at least unjust suspicions of me. An interest, which I am forbidden to confide to you, obliges me to converse a few moments in private with M. de Serbellane; this interest is the most opposite in the world to my own personal affections. I should have a bad opinion of Leonce if he could mistrust the accents of truth; and if I were not certain of convincing him, when.



I request his esteem for me, from the sincerity of my words." The dignity and simplicity of this language made a deep impression on my heart—"Ah! Delphine, what would be your perfidy, were you to render subservient to falsehood so many charms, that seem only created to render more amiable the first and involuntary movements of the soul, and to unite, in short, in one woman the elegant graces of the world, with all the simplicity of natural feeling."

Mad. d'Albemar, after her conversation with M. Serbellane returned into the ball-room, and M. d'Orson, the nephew of Mad. du Marset, who is always in want of some employment for his talents, because they serve him instead of understanding, begged Delphine to dance a Polish dance, which a Russian had taught both of them, and which excited a good deal of curiosity in the ball-room. Delphine was compelled, in some measure, to yield to his importunity; but, in the looks that she directed to me, there was something so sweet and amiable that I cannot describe it: she seemed to complain to me of the *ennui* which M. d'Orson occasioned her. Our correspondence was begun by herself; her engaging smile seemed to associate me in her observations, that were so sweetly malicious.

Both men and women mounted upon the benches to see Delphine dance. I felt my heart heave violently when I observed all eyes directed towards her; I suffered from the union even of their ideas with my own; I had been happier, had I looked at her alone.

Never did grace and beauty produce upon a numerous assembly an effect more extraordinary. This dance, which operated like a charm, and of which nothing that we have ever seen can give you the smallest idea, is a combination of indolence and vivacity, of melancholy and gaiety purely Asiatic. At times, when the air became more tender, Delphine walked some steps with her head reclined, and her arms across her bosom, as if some sad recollections, some melancholy regrets, had suddenly mingled with all the brilliance of a festival; but soon resuming the nimble and animated dance, she threw around her an Indian shawl, which gave a new expression to her shape, and flowing behind with her long hair, gave to her whole person the most charming and delightful effect.

This dance, so expressive, I had almost said inspired, exercises over the imagination an irresistible power; it represents to your ideas and sensations the most poetic, which, even under the mild sky of the East, the finest verses would in vain attempt to describe.

When Delphine had done dancing, the applauses she received were so loud and enthusiastic, that you would have be-

lieved, for a moment, that every man in the room was her adorer, and every woman her slave.

Though I am still weak, and am forbidden every exercise which has a tendency to inflame the blood, I could not resist the desire of joining Delphine in an English dance, which was just now forming all along the gallery; I therefore asked Mad. d'Albemar to lead it down with me. "Can you do it," replied she, "without risking your health?"—"Do not fear that," replied I, "I shall take hold of your hand." The dance began, and several times my arms enclosed that pliant and light form which so much charmed my eyes. At one time, when turning with Delphine, I felt her heart beat under the pressure of my hand; that heart, in which all the powers above had united their bounties, was animated for me with an emotion the most tender.

I was so happy, so transported, that I wished to begin a second time the same country dance. The music was delightful beyond conception; two melodious harps accompanied the wind instruments, and played an air at once affecting and lively. Delphine's dancing assumed, by degrees, a character more animated, and her eyes were fixed upon mine with greater expression. When the different figures of the dance led us towards each other, her arms I thought involuntarily opened to receive me; and, notwithstanding her remarkable agility, she often seemed to take pleasure in leaning on me. The exquisite raptures that animated my whole frame, made me forget that my wound was not yet perfectly whole. When we had reached the last couple that terminated the dance, I suddenly felt a sensation of weakness which made my knees even tremble. I drew Delphine, by a kind of involuntary effort, still nearer me, and said to her in a whispering voice—"Oh, Delphine! if I should thus terminate my days, would you think me to be pitied?"—"Why," interrupted she, with a voice full of emotion, "what ails you?" the alteration of my countenance so much alarmed her. We had got to the end of the dance: I supported myself against the chimney, and I put, without thinking, my hand on my wound, from which I suffered excessively. Delphine could not conceal her distress, but abandoned herself to her feelings to such a degree, that, notwithstanding my weakness, I saw the eyes of the whole company fixed on her. The dread of having her feelings wounded supplied me with new vigour, and I wished to go into the room adjoining that we were dancing in. It was only a few steps from us. Delphine, heedless of every thing but the condition in which I was, crossed the whole hall without noticing any person, followed me, and seeing me tremble as I walked, took hold of me in order to support me. I in vain assured her that I was better, and that, on breathing the free-

air, I should be well. She thought only of my danger, and never reflected that she was exposing to the whole company the excess of her uneasiness, and the unusual concern she felt for my situation.

Oh, Delphine! at that moment as if at the foot of the altar, I swore to be thy husband; I received thy vows, I received the valuable trust of thy innocent destiny, at the very moment a dark cloud was threatening, on my account, to obscure thy reputation!

When I had got near a window, I stopped to sit down: then Delphine, recollecting what had just passed, said to me with tears in her eyes, "I have acted the most extraordinary part that can possibly be conceived; your imprudence in persisting to dance has put my heart to this severe trial. Leonce! O, Leonce! is it necessary that you make me suffer, in order to know me?"—"Could you suspect me," said I to her, "of voluntarily exposing to the view of others, with respect, with love in my heart, what I myself dare scarcely recollect? But if you dread the reproach of the world, I shall soon be able——."—"The reproach of the world," interrupted she with an expression of indifference remarkably pointed, "I do not fear it; but my secret will be known before I have unbosomed myself to my friend, and you know not how culpable this will render me!"—She was going to proceed, when we heard some bustle in the saloon, and the name of Mad. d'Ervin's several times repeated. Delphine left me hastily, to inquire into the cause of this disturbance. Mad. d'Ervin's, M. de Fierville informed her, had just fallen senseless on the floor, and they were carrying her to her carriage by order of M. d'Ervin's, who did not wish her to receive assistance any where but at home.

Delphine had scarcely heard these last words, when she darted into the staircase, reached M. d'Ervin's, ascended his chariot, without saying a word to him, and drove away that moment: this was all I could perceive. The instantaneous feeling of a good and benevolent heart, hurried her away involuntarily. She left me alone in the midst of that mirth and gaiety, for which I had no longer any taste. In vain I endeavoured to seek for pleasure, which in my heart could be mingled only with love; I was penetrated, however, with that tender but serious sentiment, which expands the heart of a virtuous man, when he has disposed of his own heart, and taken upon himself the care of the happiness and life of another.

I know not if I abuse your friendship, by confiding to you the sentiments and feelings I experienced; but why should the gravity of your age and character prevent me from describing to you that pure love which directs me in the choice

of a companion for life? The details of your pupil's happiness, my dear tutor, will, I hope, be acceptable to you; they will remind you of your own youth; and this recollection will be unaccompanied by any painful regrets, as all the impressions which your memory suggests can relate only to one object, the triumphs and the rewards of virtue.

I shall delay any positive explanation with Mad. d'Albemar till I have received my mother's answer. In a few days I shall be with you at Mondeville, where you will then stand in need of me. I am anxious we should write together to my mother from that very place where she spent the first years of her marriage and of my infancy; those endearing recollections cannot fail to render her favourable to me.

## LETTER XXVIII.

MADAME DE VERNON TO M. DE CLARIMIN.

Paris, June 30, 1790:

You have been informed that M. de Mondeville is very much attached to Mademoiselle d'Albemar, and that he appears to prefer her to my daughter; you have therefore concluded that the marriage which I have projected cannot take place. You ought, however, to have a little more confidence in the dexterity which you know I possess. I am a witness of all that passes; Leonce and Delphine cannot take a single step without my perceiving it; and do you imagine that I cannot ultimately prevent this union, that would overturn all my projects of happiness and fortune.

I have occasionally availed myself of my address for very indifferent and trivial objects; but now I am called upon, by all the feelings of a parent, to protect my daughter; and do you imagine I shall not succeed? You tell me that Mademoiselle d'Albemar conceals from me her affection for Leonce. I assure you I shall have her confidence whenever I wish it; but I am just now studying how to avoid it, for she would lead me into engagements, from which I am anxious at present to be free.

The characters of Leonce and Delphine are by no means similar: Leonce is haughty as a Spaniard, elated with his own importance, as much as Delphine is really lovely and amiable. It is absolutely necessary indeed to separate them for the interest of both, and an opportunity of doing so I hope will very soon present itself. Time only is necessary, and I defy either

Leonce or Delphine to hasten events which I am determined to delay. Nobody knows better than I do how to avail myself of the apparent indolence and inattention of my character; they enable me to combat with greater ease the activity of others. I wish for the marriage of Leonce with Matilda. I have hardly subjected myself to the trouble of wishing four times in my life; but since I have already interested myself so much in the accomplishment of this wish, nothing shall divert me from my purpose, and I shall accomplish it, you may depend upon it.

I thank you for the friendly concern you express for me, and the kind interest you take in my success; but when the destiny of my daughter is in question, when my own destruction or happiness, and, in a word, when every thing I consider as valuable is so nearly concerned, do you think I will lose any opportunity, or neglect any expedient? I take good care, however, to conduct myself in an affair of such importance with much greater vigilance and caution than I am accustomed to do in things of trifling and inferior moment; for it is patience and secrecy only that give effect to every arrangement. Adieu then, my dear Clarimin; as I hope to see you soon at Paris, I invite you thither to the nuptials of my daughter.

## LETTER XXIX.

### DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

THERESA is undone, my dear Louisa, and I know not what measures to adopt to alleviate the sorrows of her cruel destiny. I entertained some hopes of my own happiness two days ago at Mad. de Vernon's ball. Leonce and I had almost come to an explanation; but since this misfortune happened to Theresa, I have felt so much for her, and been so much agitated, that I have let two evenings pass without seeing Mad. de Vernon, or even going to her house. Leonce would have observed my melancholy, and I would not have been at liberty to avow to him the real cause of it. If there is any duty I hold more sacred than another, it is that of keeping inviolably the secret of my friend; and how could I prevent its being discovered by the person whom I love? I therefore know nothing of Leonce, and Mad. d'Ervin's alone engages my whole attention.

Mad. du Marset, so much the reverse of every thing that is feeling or sentimental, that she is as incapable of feeling tenderness as unable to inspire it, knew M. d'Ervin's at Paris fifteen years ago, before his marriage with Theresa. The day before yesterday, Mad. du Marset being seated immediately next him at the ball, was incessantly whispering to him, while Theresa was dancing with M. de Serbellane. I cannot believe that Mad. du Marset could be capable of positively exciting suspicions in the bosom of M. d'Ervin's. The most malicious characters are unwilling to confess that they are so, and always reserve some plausible means of excuse to others, as well as to themselves. But I thought I observed, from certain words that escaped M. d'Ervin's in his fury, that Mad. du Marset, on learning that M. de Serbellane had passed six months at his chateau with his wife, was disposed to laugh at the ridiculous part which he must have acted in trio with those two young lovers; and of all the words which she could possibly select, the most perfidious and provoking must have been that of *ridiculous*, for M. d'Ervin's repeated it incessantly in his rage; and when at any time he left off speaking, he had only to mutter it again to himself, to make her resume the subject with more violence than ever.

I passed M. d'Ervin's some moments after his conversation with Mad. du Marset, and I was surprised at the seriousness of his countenance. As I knew nothing serious or thoughtful in his character, but what might be the offspring of self-love, I could not doubt for a moment that he had met with something that offended him. Theresa made the same observations to me; and, at the same time, whether, as she has told me since, an unhappy passion agitated her bosom, or whether this kind of entertainment, entirely new to her, overpowered her senses, and deprived her of the capability of reflection; her partiality for M. de Serbellane was only too perceptible, and could not possibly escape the observation of the company. M. d'Ervin's affected to keep at a distance from her; but I could easily perceive that he did not wish to lose sight of her. I gave a hint of this to M. Serbellane; I could depend, I knew, upon his prudence: and, in consequence of this, he industriously avoided speaking to Theresa. Had I not then quitted Mad. d'Ervin's, perhaps I should have been able to calm the uneasiness she felt from the assumed coldness of M. de Serbellane. She did not know the cause, and was unable to support the idea of it. Wholly engaged with Leonce during the rest of the evening, I entirely forgot Mad. d'Ervin's. It was this neglect, alas! which was perhaps the cause of her misfortune.

I was in conversation with Leonce, when I was alarmed by the intelligence, that they were carrying away Mad. d'Ervin's

in a faint. I ran to her husband, who was following her; I got into his carriage almost in opposition to his wishes, and took into my arms the unhappy Theresa, who had fallen into so deep a swoon, that she exhibited no longer any signs of life.—"Who," exclaimed I to M. d'Ervin, "has put her into this dreadful condition?" "Her own conscience, madam," replied he—"Her own conscience!"—And he then related to me what had passed in a paroxysm of rage, with which there did not mingle a single sentiment of pity for this charming creature, apparently expiring before him.

Placed behind a door, at the moment his wife was passing from the one chamber to the other, he had heard her reproach M. de Serbellane, in a language that indicated the most intimate union: he then advanced, and taking his wife by the hand, said to her in a low voice, but with the sternest resentment—"Look at him, this perfidious stranger—look at him, for you shall never see him more!" At these words Theresa fell motionless at his feet. M. d'Ervin was proud of the distress he had caused her, and only rejoiced in his cruel triumph.

When we arrived at Mad. d'Ervin's house, her daughter Isore, seeing her mother brought back in this melancholy condition, uttered the most lamentable cries, to which M. d'Ervin, however, did not deign to pay the smallest attention. We put Theresa to bed, dressed as she was with garlands of flowers, and all the other decorations with which she appeared at the ball: she had the appearance of having been struck with a thunderbolt in the midst of a festival of gaiety and joy.

My attentions recalled her to life; but she was in a state of delirium that every moment betrayed her fatal secret. I wished M. d'Ervin to leave me alone with her; but so far from consenting, he came to tell me my carriage was waiting, and that at present he desired to converse with his wife, without any witnesses. "For the sake of your daughter," said I to him, "M. d'Ervin, for the sake of your daughter, take care of Theresa; do not forget ten years of happiness; do not forget——."—"I know, madam," interrupted he, "what I owe to myself; do not fear that I shall ever forget my own personal dignity."—"And will you not," resumed I, "will you not forget the danger of Theresa?"—"Whatever is proper shall be done," replied he, "whatever it may cost: she has the honour to bear my name; I shall therefore take care of every thing that either her own duty or mine requires." I left this detestable man, this man capable of seeing nothing in nature but himself alone, nor in himself any thing but his own pride. I returned once more to the unfortunate Theresa: I embraced her; I swore to her the most tender and disin-

terested friendship, and recommended to her prudence and courage. She answered only in a faint and tremulous voice—"Let me see you again." I departed with a heart wrung with anguish.

Upon returning home, about two in the morning, I found M. de Serbellane waiting for me. You will easily imagine how I was affected by his grief! Those characters that are habitually cool, are sometimes overpowered by their passions, and are then susceptible of the strongest and most indelible impressions. He struggled, with the greatest efforts, to restrain his resentment against M. d'Ervins. These words, however, at one time escaped him—"Let him not make me apprehensive for the safety of his wife; let him not threaten her with unworthy and dishonourable treatment; for if he do, I shall then find it necessary to fight with him, to put an end to his existence, and thus deliver Theresa from his cruel persecution; and, if ever I am destined to act this part, which is certainly the most reasonable, with what joy will I embrace it!" I calmed his resentment, by telling him that I would see Theresa again next day, and that I would relate to him faithfully the condition I should find her in. We parted, after his having promised to take no step of any kind before seeing me again.

I could not procure admission to Theresa till eight in the evening: I had been there ten different times, but to no purpose; her husband had shut her up. Her condition now alarms me, even more than it did last night. Oh! what an unhappy destiny! M. d'Ervins has not left her a single moment either night or day; he has loaded her with reproaches the most insolent and outrageous; he has extorted from her every confession which might have a tendency to criminate herself, by always threatening her, if she deceived him, to interrogate M. de Serbellane himself. At last he concluded, by declaring, that M. de Serbellane must quit France in twenty-four hours—"I am ignorant," said he, "of the means you will take to communicate to him this notice. You may write to him, if you please, a letter, which I shall not desire to see; but if, after ten to-morrow evening he be still in Paris, I shall make it my business to find him, and we shall then come to an explanation. I feel very much inclined, indeed, to this last measure, and it cannot possibly be avoided, unless he give me full satisfaction, by removing instantly from Paris at my first intimation."

Theresa had promised every thing, but what concerned her most, perhaps, was the promise I had made her, fifteen days ago, of procuring them a parting interview. Her imagination was less alarmed at the apprehension of a duel between her lover and her husband, than at the idea that she should no



more see M. de Serbellane: she threw herself at my feet, to conjure me to preserve her from such a misfortune. Those dreadful words which M. d'Ervin had pronounced at the ball, those words, *You shall see him no more*, recurred always to her recollection: in repeating them, she was in such a state of agitation, that you would have imagined with these words alone she would have terminated her existence. She said, if this cruel hardship imposed upon her was not put in execution, if she were permitted once more to see M. de Serbellane, if she could be certain only that their separation would not be eternal, she would have courage to support his departure; but, if this last adieu was denied her, she could not answer for her life—she would be unable to survive it. I wished to abstract her attention from this subject; but she always repeated to me—“Shall I not see him—shall I not be even permitted to bid him adieu?” And my silence threw her into such an agony of despair, that I was obliged to promise I would consent to every thing that M. de Serbellane should think proper: “Well then! I shall be tranquil,” said she, “for I have written to him the most pressing and irresistible entreaties.”

You will think, perhaps, my dear Louisa, you who are an angel of goodness, that I ought not to have hesitated to satisfy Theresa, particularly after the engagement I had previously made with her. Is it necessary to confess to you the motive that made me hesitate to comply with her request? If Leonce hears, by any accident, that I have procured an interview at my own house, between a married woman and her lover, in opposition to the positive prohibition of her husband, will he approve of my conduct? Is Leonce then become the arbiter of my conduct, and am I no longer capable of judging for myself what generosity and pity require of me?

Upon leaving Theresa, I went to Mad. de Vernon's: Leonce had just left it; he had been inquiring for me at my own house, and complained, according to what Matilda very naturally told me, of the time that I spent at M. d'Ervin's. M. de Fierville then made himself merry with me on the manner in which I passed my time. These sallies of pleasantry immediately led me to understand that he had seen M. de Serbellane leave my house at three in the morning, on the day of the ball. I felt inexpressible resentment and grief, but saw no way of justifying myself from this imputation. I was vexed at the idea that Leonce must have heard of it, and, to add to my confusion, M. de Serbellane at that moment entered the room. He had come, he told me, from my house, and M. de Fierville again smiled. It appeared to me a smile of the most infernal malice but, instead of rousing me to self-defence, it froze me only with horror, and I received M. de Serbellane with unusual coldness.

He was so astonished at my manner, that he could scarcely believe it, and his looks seemed to say to me, "For heaven's sake, what is the matter with you—what has happened to you?" His surprise soon restored me to myself. "No, Leonce," said I to myself, "you command my heart, you have every power over me; but I will not sacrifice for you goodness, that generous goodness, the cultivation of which has been the whole employment of my life." I then determined to take M. de Serbellane aside, and, communicating to him in a few words every thing that had passed, I told him that a letter from Theresa was waiting for him at home, and he immediately took his leave in order to peruse it.

After this exertion of courage and integrity, for it was of myself only I had made a sacrifice, I wished to make an attempt to rally M. de Fierville. I asked myself why I could not exert my spirit to dissipate their unmerited suspicions; but M. de Fierville was calm, and I was agitated: my words partook of the uneasiness that preyed upon my heart, whilst all his, on the contrary, were uttered with the utmost *sang froid*. I attempted to be cheerful, in order to show how little I regarded what he thought of so much consequence; but my attempts at wit were constrained, while the most perfect ease and tranquillity added to his pleasantry an additional poignancy. I again became serious, hoping to be able, by some means, to gain the victory; but he repelled by irony and ridicule the too keen sensations which I was unable to conceal. Never did I experience more truly that there are men on whom you throw away, to no purpose, language and sentiments that are even the best calculated to produce an impression. They are anxious only to exclude truth by jest and ridicule, and as their triumph consists in not hearing you, it is in vain that you endeavour to make yourself be understood.

I felt very much, however, from my embarrassed situation, when Mad. de Vernon kindly came to my assistance. She made some witticisms on M. de Fierville, which were even superior to his own, and took him aside to the window, whispering me, at the same time, that she was going to undeceive him in regard to every thing that gave me uneasiness, if I would permit her to speak with him alone. I cannot express to you, my dear Louisa, how much I was affected by this kind and generous conduct, by this relief given me at a time when I really stood in need of it. With tears in my eyes I grasped the hand of Mad. de Vernon, and promised to see her to-morrow in order no longer to keep a secret which distresses me: you shall know, therefore, to-morrow, my dear Louisa, what is to be my fate.

## LETTER XXX.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

July 14.

I have spent a very busy day, my dear Louisa, though I have not yet succeeded in procuring an interview with Mad. de Vernon. To-day I have experienced some moments of happiness, but the events that have passed impress my mind with feelings of the deepest anxiety. As soon as I rose I wrote to Mad. de Vernon, requesting to be admitted alone at her usual breakfast hour; and though I did not mention directly the subject on which I wished to speak to her, I believe my language sufficiently disclosed the secret. She kept my servant waiting about two hours, and at last sent him back with a note, in which she made an apology for not receiving my visit; she concluded with these remarkable words: "In short, my dear Delphine, I can read the sentiments of your heart as plainly as you can do yourself; but I do not think the time is yet come when it would be proper for us to talk together." These words have cost me much reflection, and I am still at a loss how to understand them. Why, thought I, should she decline an interview? She told me herself, that for two days past she has not had any conversation with Leonce on the subject of the intended nuptials. Is it possible that she has discovered my passion for him? Will she prove so generous, so warm a friend, as to break off this match to gratify my wishes, without even acquainting me with her design? How I should blush to be dealt with so nobly! What have I done to deserve such a sacrifice? But if these were her intentions, how could she be so unjust as to expose Matilda every day to the company of Leonce? In a word, to put an end to this state of uncertainty, so tormenting, I resolved to go directly to her house, and compel her to hear me.

But what had I to say to her? That I loved Leonce, that I wished to oppose the happiness of her daughter, and to thwart the execution of the plans we had concerted? Ah! my Louisa, you are too indulgent to my weakness; I will not, however, flatter myself with hopes till Mad. de Vernon has heard me, till she has decided my fate.

M. de Serbellane arrived at my house just as I was going out. I was struck at the change which appeared in his countenance; it bore the marks of the deepest affliction. "I have read her letter," said he to me, "it has made me ill. I flat-

tered myself that I never should be the cause of sorrow to any human being, and you see I have ruined the most amiable of her sex. Let us consider now," continued he, endeavouring to command himself, "let us consider what remains to be done. Although it is extremely painful to my feelings to show any appearance of yielding to the pleasure of M. d'Ervin's at parting, I give my consent in compliance with the wishes of Theresa, nor am I afraid that any person will imagine, that in doing so I have been guided by motives of personal safety. You, madam," added he, "from whom I have received so many proofs of angelic goodness, you will not deny me when I request, as the last pledge of your friendship, that you will receive Theresa and me at your house in the evening of the day after tomorrow. I shall take leave ostensibly the same morning. M. d'Ervin's will think himself certain that I am on my way to Portugal; some business requires his presence at Saint Germain; and while he is there Theresa will come secretly to your house. I know the request I now make would be refused by a woman of an ordinary cast of mind; that it would be granted without reflection by one of a light disposition; and that I shall obtain it from the goodness of your heart. I have not, perhaps, always participated in those lively emotions which have been excited in the breast of Theresa; but in the present state of my feelings this meeting is no less necessary to my happiness than to hers: the events which have lately happened have stamped upon my character an impression of which I did not think it susceptible; I wish that Theresa should hear what I have to say to her respecting the situation in which she is placed."

M. de Serbellane here stopped, astonished at my silence. What passed yesterday with M. de Fierville gave me still greater repugnance than before to take any farther steps in this affair; and I considered that malice or calumny, if I complied, might ruin me in the opinion of Leonce. I had not, however, the courage to refuse M. de Serbellane; for what excuse had I to urge? I was ashamed to rest my denial on scruples of morality, for that was not the real cause of my hesitation; and my heart detests the thought of laying claim to sentiments of esteem to which I have no title.

I do not know whether M. de Serbellane perceived the struggle which I felt; but taking me by the hand, he said to me, with that calmness which always carries with it an appearance of superior understanding, "You promised it to Theresa; I was a witness to your promise; she trusts you will fulfil it; and will you betray the confidence which she reposes in you? will you be insensible to her despair?" "No," replied I, "if ever she be reduced to this unhappy condition, I shall not be the cause of her misery; employ this interview in endeavouring to restore her to tranquillity, to lead her back to

those duties which her fate imposes on her; and, whatever unhappy consequences may result to myself from my compliance with your wishes, I shall at least avoid the imputation of an unfeeling heart, I shall have some claim to pity."—"Generous friend!" cried M. de Serbellane, "you will be happy in the excellence of your own feelings; I guessed what they would be; I have no hesitation in putting them to the trial; and the warmest wishes of my heart are for your welfare. I shall take care to conduct this interview with such prudence and secrecy, as you may be assured will prevent any inconvenience which you may dread. I will avail myself of these few hours that remain, to fortify the mind of Theresa, and in your house not a word shall be uttered unbecoming the purity of your character. The following night I must take my departure; I must bid adieu, perhaps for ever, to a woman who has loved me more than any other woman ever did; and to you, madam, to you, whose heart is so noble, so tender, and so sincere." This was the first time M. de Serbellane ever expressed his esteem for me with any degree of warmth. I was affected by his manner; the least word which he utters finds its way instantly to the heart. The courage with which he had inspired me supported me for some moments; but scarcely was he gone when I fell into a train of the most gloomy ideas while reflecting on the dangers to which the engagement I had just made would expose me.

If I had consulted Leonce, thought I with myself, would he not have disapproved of the step I have taken? Of this, at least, I am certain, he would not wish his wife to be guilty of such weakness. Alas! why do I not observe the same conduct now which he would expect from me if I were his wife? But had I not before given my promise? Could I have supported the thought of being the voluntary cause of such heart-rending sorrow? No; but would to heaven this day had never passed.

I followed the plan which I had proposed of going to Mad. de Vernon's, although the distracted state of mind into which I was thrown, by the promise I had given to M. de Serbellane, made me very unfit for speaking to her. I found Leonce alone with Mad. de Vernon; he had come to take leave of her before going to Mondeville, where he intends to spend a few days. He lamented that he had not seen me, but spoke of my devotion to the cause of friendship in terms so affecting, that I must flatter myself he loved me the better for it. He supported the conversation without the least embarrassment. I imagined, on watching his looks, I could discern that his resolution was taken, before his manner discovered his inclination; but it was not determined; his tranquillity inspired me with the most flattering hopes: had he sacrificed me to another, it would have been impossible for him to behold me with a look of undisturbed serenity.

Mad. de Vernon was going to the Thuilleries to wait on the Queen, and begged me to accompany her; Leonce offered to attend us. I went home to dress myself, and in a quarter of an hour after Leonce and Mad. de Vernon came to fetch me.

We were waiting for the Queen in the saloon which leads to her chamber, with about forty of the most distinguished women in Paris, when Mad. de R. made her appearance: she is a careless creature, who has lost her reputation by real misconduct and an inconceivable levity of character. I have seen her three or four times at the house of her aunt, Mad. d'Artenas: I have always carefully avoided forming any intimacy with her; but I have had occasion to remark in her conversation great sweetness of disposition, and much goodness of heart. I know not how she could be so imprudent as to appear at the Thuilleries without her aunt, since she must know so well that no woman wishes to speak to her in public. The moment she entered, Mad. de St. Albe and Mad. de Tesin, who delight to execute rigorous punishment on every offender, and who gladly seize an opportunity of gratifying the natural haughtiness of their tempers, under the pretence of a tender regard for the interests of virtue, immediately quitted the place where they were seated on the side where Mad. de R. was; at the same instant all the other ladies rose, whether from affectation or timidity, and came to the other end of the room, to join Mad. de Vernon, Mad. de Marsset, and myself. The gentlemen in a short time followed their example; for, while they seduce the women, they wish to retain the right of punishing them for their compliance.

Mad. de R. was left alone, exposed to the observation of the whole company, seeing the circle retire as she approached it, and unable to conceal her confusion. The moment was come when the Queen was expected either to enter the saloon, or to come out to receive us. I foresaw that the scene would become still more distressing. The eyes of Mad. de R. were filled with tears; she cast a look around us all, as if to implore the assistance of some one. I could not help pitying her unhappy situation. The fear of displeasing Leonce, that fear which is never absent from my thoughts, still kept me back; but another look thrown at Mad. de R. so powerfully excited my compassion, that, by a motion altogether involuntary, I crossed the saloon, and seated myself beside her. "Yes," I then said to myself, "once more let the forms of society be sacrificed to the genuine feelings of the heart, since once more they are at variance with its dictates."

Mad. de R. received me with as much gratitude as if I had restored her to life: in truth, it is a kindness no less deserving of gratitude, to assuage those griefs which society can inflict, when it exercises all its power without being restrained by

any motives of compassion. Scarcely had I spoken to Mad. de R. when I felt myself irresistibly inclined to turn my eyes to Leonce: I discovered some embarrassment in his looks, but I saw no marks of displeasure. His eyes seemed to run over the assembly to examine what effect my behaviour had produced upon others, but it did not appear to have made any unfavourable impression on his own mind.

Mad. de Vernon continued all the while to converse with M. de Fierville, and did not appear as if she observed what was passing. I supported tolerably well till the end whatever may be supposed painful in the part which I had undertaken to perform. On leaving the apartment of the Queen, Mad. de R. said to me with a warmth which repaid me a thousand times for the sacrifice I made, "Generous Delphine! you have given me the only lesson which is capable of making any impression on me; you have made me in love with virtue, with the courage and the superiority which it confers. You will learn in a few years, that from this day forward I shall be no longer the same. It will be long before I think myself worthy of seeing you; but this is the ultimate object of my wishes, this is the hope which will support me." When she had pronounced these words, I took hold of her hand, and pressed it closely in mine. A reproachful smile from Mad. du Marset, and a look from M. de Fierville, plainly showed their disapprobation: they were both speaking to Leonce, and I was persuaded I saw him deeply affected with what he heard. I looked every where for Mad. de Vernon, but she was still with the Queen. At this moment of suspense Leonce came up to me, and, with a degree of seriousness, asked permission to see me alone at my own house, as soon as he had conducted Mad. de Vernon to her home. I gave my consent by a nod; my agitation was too violent to allow me to speak.

I returned home, and attempted to read till Leonce should arrive; but, having passed three hours without seeing him, I began to suspect that Mad. de Vernon had detained him; that he had come to an explanation with her; that she had prevailed so far over his delicacy as to persuade him to adhere to the engagements of his mother; and that he was about to write to me to excuse himself from coming to see me. While I was making these reflections, a servant entered with a letter in his hand, and I had no doubt that this was the apology of Leonce. I took it without seeing any thing—a cloud had come over my eyes: but when I read the signature of Theresa, I felt a sensation of the most lively satisfaction. She wished to see me at her house in the evening; and I replied that I would go with all possible haste. I believe I felt no small degree of gratitude to Theresa, because it was she that had written to me.

I sat down again more tranquil than before; but in a short time my uneasiness returned. I had learned, in the course of an hour, to distinguish perfectly the noise of the different carriages. I knew at once those which came from the quarter where Mad. de Vernon's house is situated. When they approached, I held in my breath in order to hear more distinctly; and when they had passed my door, my spirits relapsed into the most painful depression. At last one of them stopped; I heard a rap at the door; and as soon as it was opened, I discovered the blue coach of Leonce, which is so well known to me. I felt an emotion of shame at the condition in which I had been. I was afraid lest Leonce should discover it, and hastened to resume my book, and to prepare myself to receive, with all the ceremonies of a formal visit, the man whom I expected with a palpitation of the heart which lifted the robe on my bosom.

Leonce at length appeared: the air became more light and more pure at his approach. He began by telling me that Mad. de Vernon had detained him in the most pressing manner, without speaking to him on any interesting subject, but by repeatedly calling him back to charge him with commissions of the most trivial nature. "It is her duty," said I, making an effort to speak, "to employ every method to gain your esteem; you cannot be surprised at her conduct."—"It is not she," replied Leonce in a tone of melancholy, "who can influence my fate; you alone hold this empire: I know not whether you will exercise it to promote my happiness." This doubt astonished me; I was silent; he went on:—"If I possessed the happiness of having gained an interest in your heart, would you not reflect on the opportunities which you afford to the censures of the malicious? would you forget the character of my mother, and the obstacles——" He stopped and leaned his head on his hand.—"What do you reproach me with, Leonce?" said I to him; "I wish to hear it before I attempt to justify myself."—"Your intimacy with Mad. de R. Ought Mad. d'Albemar to choose such a friend?"—"I saw her to-day for the third time in my life," replied I; "I have not been once at her house since I came to Paris, and she has never come to mine."—"What!" cried Leonce, "and Mad. du Marset has had the audacity to tell me——" "You listen to her; you are still more culpable than she."

"This is not all yet," added I; "did you not disapprove of my placing myself beside her?"—"No," replied Leonce, "I suffered, but I did not blame you."—"You suffered!" replied I, with a good deal of warmth, "when I yielded to the impulse of a generous feeling; alas! Leonce, it was the misery of this unhappy woman which ought to have occasioned distress, and not the fortunate occurrence which gave



me an opportunity of relieving her. Without doubt Mad. de R. has degraded her character; but do we know all the circumstances which led to her ruin? Did her husband act the part of a protector, or was he a man unworthy of being loved? Did her parents watch with care over her education? Was the first object of her choice the guardian of her destiny, or did he not blast every hope which love could cherish, every sentiment of delicacy which was planted in her breast? Alas! in how many ways does the fortune of the women depend upon the men! But I will not boast of having reasoned this morning on the conduct of Mad. de R. or the indulgence to which she may be entitled; I was drawn towards her by an emotion of pity, which was in nowise the result of deep reflection. I was not her judge, and I ought to have been something more than her judge, before I could have been justified for refusing to comfort her under so severe a punishment as public scorn. Do you imagine that these women, who committed this outrage on her feelings, would have fled from her had they met her alone in the country? No, they would have spoken to her; their virtuous indignation, finding itself without witnesses, would not have been roused. How much insignificant vanity and unfeeling cruelty is displayed in this ostentation of virtue, in this sacrifice of a human victim, not to morality, but to pride! Listen to me, Leonce," said I with enthusiasm; "I love you, you know it; I would not seek to conceal it from you, though you were yet ignorant of it; far be from me all stratagems to conceal the emotions of the heart, even the most innocent: but I will not sacrifice to my passion, strong as it is, those qualities which I owe to the beloved friends who took charge of me in my childhood; I will brave what is to me the greatest of all dangers, the danger of incurring your displeasure; yes, I will brave it, when I am called upon to give consolation to the unfortunate."

Long before I had ended, I read on the countenance of Leonce that I had triumphed over all his severity; but he was pleased with hearing me, and I went on encouraged by his looks. "Delphine," said he, laying hold of my hand, "heavenly Delphine! I can no longer resist you. Of what consequence is it that our characters and opinions should accord in every thing? There is not in the universe a woman of the same nature with yourself! What features can display that divine assemblage of charms which heaven has portrayed upon your countenance, and which raises you above comparison with all other women? That soul, that voice, those looks, have taken possession of my soul. I know not what may be my fate if I am united with you; but without you there is nothing for me upon earth but faded colours, confused images, and fleeting shadows, nothing exists, nothing is animated,

where you are not present. Consent then," cried he, throwing himself at my feet, "consent to become the companion of my destiny, the angel who shall walk before me during the years I have yet to wander on the earth. Be the guardian of my happiness, which I commit to you with my life: be indulgent to my failings; they arise, like my love, from the warmth of my temper; and pray to heaven for me on the day of our union, that I may die young, still the object of your love, before I experience the least diminution of the tender attachment which your heart has so generously yielded."

Ah, Louisa! what sentiments did I feel! I locked his hands in mine; I wept; I was afraid to interrupt, by a single word, this enchanting discourse. Leonce told me he was going to write to his mother, to declare formally his intention, and entreated I would promise to marry him, whatever answer he might receive from Spain, the very moment it arrived. My heart consented with transport to a proposal in which the happiness of my life was concerned, when, on a sudden, I reflected that this request was inconsistent with the resolution which I had formed, of confiding my secret to Mad. de Vernon before I entered into any engagement. Delicacy required me not to give any decisive answer without first acquainting her. I did not wish to inform Leonce of my resolution on this head, from the fear of irritating him; I replied, therefore, that I begged he would not exact any promise from me before his return. He started back with astonishment at these words, and his looks assumed an expression of the deepest disappointment. I was going to comfort him, when all at once the door opened, and I beheld Mad. de Vernon, her daughter, and M. de Fierville. I was extremely disturbed when they entered, and I regretted, above all, that I had not been able to explain myself to Leonce on the refusal which had given him so much uneasiness. Mad. de Vernon did not observe my confusion, but sat down without any ceremony, telling me that she had come to ask me to dine with her. Matilda was at first somewhat astonished at seeing Leonce with me, but her astonishment passed off without exciting the least suspicion; her slow settled ideas preserve her from the effects of jealousy.—"A-propos," said Mad. de Vernon to me, "is it true that M. de Serbellane sets off the day after to-morrow for Portugal?" I blushed extremely at this question, being afraid lest it should expose Theresa, and answered hastily that he had gone this very morning. Leonce looked at me for some time with the most eager attention, and then fell into a reverie. I felt anew the misery of possessing the secret which I was condemned to keep, and my breast was agitated with as much violence as if my happiness had been exposed to the greatest danger. Mad. de Vernon proposed to me that

we should depart: she insisted, though faintly, that Leonce should go to her house; but M. Barton was expecting him, and he refused. As I was going into the carriage, he said to me, in a low voice, but with a tone of the greatest solemnity—"Remember that, with a character such as mine, the least duplicity of heart, the least dissimulation, would irretrievably destroy both my happiness and my confidence." It being impossible to speak to him, surrounded as I was, I could only answer his suspicions with a look; he understood it, pressed my hand, and left me; but since that moment the sad impression which this scene left upon my mind has never been effaced.

It is at last agreed that Mad. de Vernon shall receive me ~~alone~~ to-morrow evening. Before that time, Theresa and her lover will have met at my house, so that to-morrow will be a busy day. I saw Theresa this evening. She had been informed of my promise by a word from M. de Serbellane; I could not have persuaded her, had I wished it, that I was capable of retracting. Her husband believes that M. de Serbellane is on his journey; he will go to-morrow to Saint-Germain; every thing is arranged in the most irrevocable manner: I am bound by a thousand ties, but I hope this is the last secret that shall ever exist betwixt Leonce and me. You, my sister, to whom I have told every thing, will think of your friend: my fate will soon be decided.

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## LETTER XXXI.

### LEONCE TO HIS MOTHER.

Mondeville, July 6, 1790.

I AM in the midst of those scenes where you<sup>m</sup> passed the happiest years of the married state: it was here, my excellent mother, that you nursed my infancy. Every place fills my mind with the sweetest recollections; and on looking round me I am again inspired with the confidence in the future which forms the happiness of our earlier years. Here also my affection for you glows with unusual ardour, that affection which my heart would willingly bestow, though it were not enjoined by the most sacred of duties. The strong resemblance which my character bears to your own, will enable you the better to judge of my feelings; consider then, I con-

jure you, with all your attention, and with all that interest you have in my happiness, the request which I am now going to make.

I am exposed to misery in a thousand ways; the irritability of my temper is accessible to torments of every description: there exists for me only one source of comfort, and I shall never taste of happiness upon earth, if I am not married to a woman whom I love, and whose mind is capable of exciting an interest in mine. It is not the impetuous admiration of a young man for a handsome woman which I consider as necessary to ensure the happiness of my life; you know that reflection is always mixed with my warmest sentiments: it is true that I am deeply enamoured of Mademoiselle d'Albemar, but it is no less certain that reason has been my guide in the choice I have made of her as the ruler of my destiny.

Mademoiselle de Vernon is handsome, prudent, and sensible; I am convinced she will never give her husband any reasonable ground of complaint, and that her conduct will be guided by the strictest principles; but is it the mere absence of misery that I look for in marriage? Were this my only view, might I not as well remain single? But I should not attain even this object by consenting to the union which you propose. With the affections and the understanding which nature hath given me, what happiness could I enjoy in the society of a woman whose character is altogether different? How often have you had occasion to remark in the intercourse of life, with what difficulty persons of moderate endowments unite with those whose minds are of a higher order? The most vulgar and the most exalted souls harmonize much more easily; but mediocrity is incapable of supposing any thing above the standard of its own intelligence, and regards as folly every thing that surpasses it. The character and understanding of Mademoiselle de Vernon are already formed, and are incapable of being either changed or modified; she has particular arguments on every subject, and the thoughts of others never enter into her consideration. She constantly opposes some common idea to every new thought that is started, and believes she has gained a triumph. What pleasure can be derived from the conversation of such a woman (and is not the mutual interchange of sentiment one of the chief sources of enjoyment in the married state?) How many emotions, how many reflections, how many sentiments and observations would arise which I could never communicate to Matilda! and what should I do with all that I could not confide to her, with the one half of my soul to which she could never be united?

Alas! my dear mother, I shall be alone, for ever alone with any other woman than Delphine; and this solitude of the under-

standing and the heart, in the presence of the object who till the end of life ought to be the only happiness of my being, is an evil which would always increase with time. I could not support such an existence; I would go elsewhere to seek that perfect society, that harmony of souls, without which the mind of man can never be satisfied; and when I should grow old, I would return to spend my sad days in the company of her, on whose memory there could not dwell any tender recollections of my younger years.

What a prospect! My dear mother, can you doom your son to such misery, when the most propitious fortune presents him with an object who would form the happiness of every period of his life, a woman the most beautiful of her sex, and at the same time one who, when stripped of all the charms of youth, would still possess the treasures of time, sweetness of temper, excellence of understanding, and goodness of heart? By a bold education you have given great activity both to my virtues and my defects; do you think that such a character can be rendered happy at an easy rate?

If you had entered into engagements which could not be dissolved, engagements which were consecrated by honour, I should be content, I should sacrifice the happiness of my life to preserve the sanctity of your word; but certainly the consent which you gave was not of this description, since you never advanced such an objection in your answers to ten letters which I wrote to be informed on this very point. You brought nothing forward but the unjust prepossessions which you have been led to entertain against Mademoiselle d'Albemar.

You have been told that she is giddy, imprudent, a coquette, and a freethinker; every quality which you dislike has been heaped upon the head of Delphine. Will you refuse then, my dear mother, to listen to the report of your son, as willingly as you have done to that of Mad. du Marset. Delphine was educated in retirement, by people who were ignorant of the world, but whose minds were notwithstanding highly enlightened; she has lived in Paris only for a year, and has not yet learned to be on her guard against the unfavourable judgments of mankind. She believes that moral rectitude is sufficient to guide her conduct, and that received opinions, and the ordinary forms of society, ought to be despised, when the interests of virtue are not concerned. But her solicitude to promote my happiness will correct this fault; for goodness of disposition, and tenderness of heart, are the leading features of her character. She loves me; what then shall I not be able to obtain from her, both for your sake and my own?

You have been told of the superiority of her understanding; and, as you have consented, at my entreaty, to live with me next year, you are afraid of finding in her a daughter-in-law

of an overbearing character. Matilda, whose understanding is limited, has an absolute will of her own in the most trifling circumstances of domestic life; Delphine knows no other interests in the world than sentiment and reason: she is as unconcerned, as she is ignorant, about the little details of ordinary affairs, and gives herself up with joy to the inclinations of others; she desires only to please and to be loved. You will be the constant object of her most assiduous care. I think I see her with Mad. de Vernon; never did filial affection, never did the fondest or the most devoted friendship, give rise to more amiable conduct. Ah! my dear mother, it concerns your happiness no less than mine, that I should accomplish my marriage with Mademoiselle d'Albemar.

You have never reflected how difficult it would be for you to manage the self-love of a person of an ordinary character: with what delight, on the other hand, and with what facility, is every thing conducted when you have to deal with a being of truly superior merit! The very opinions of Delphine are a thousand times more easily modified than those of Matilda. Delphine is never afraid of being humbled; she can feel none of those mortifications which are occasioned by vanity: accustomed as she is to the discovery of so many new truths, she is always ready to acknowledge an error, and her heart delights to yield to the superior knowledge of those whom she loves.

You have been farther told, I am ashamed to write it, that she is false and deceitful; that I am ignorant of her past life, and the present state of her affections. Her past life! All the world knows it. The present state of her affections! What have you heard about M. de Serbellane? why do you not name him? No, Delphine has concealed nothing from me, Delphine false! Delphine deceitful! If that be true, then is her character despicable indeed, for she has profaned the most precious gifts which nature ever bestowed, to insnare the heart and mislead the judgment.

In a word, I will dare to tell you, without violating that profound respect which my heart so gladly pays you, that I am resolved to marry Mademoiselle d'Albemar, unless you can prove to me that the obligations of honour oppose the completion of my wishes. The sacrifice I should then be obliged to make would soon be followed by that of my life: honour might require this of me: but you, my dear mother, you surely could not be happy if its demands were satisfied at such a price!

## LETTER XXXII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, July 6.

*My dear Sister,*

THE dreadful apprehensions which pressed upon my spirits yesterday, were certainly presentiments inspired by Heaven to warn me of the danger which surrounded me! Alas! what an event has resulted from my fatal compliance! I feel all that remorse which torments the guilty; nor can I escape from such reflections but by giving way to feelings still more painful, by placing before me the spectacle of the despair of Theresa. And Leonce! righteous Heaven! what will he think of my imprudent conduct? My Louisa, I repeat to myself every moment, if you had been near me none of these misfortunes could have befallen me. But the kindness and sympathy natural to my character lead me far from a guide, who to these qualities knows how to add a judgment more steady than mine.

Yesterday, at two o'clock, M. d'Ervin's went to dine at Saint Germain, at the house of a friend, thinking himself certain that M. de Serbellane was gone. Mad. d'Ervin's arrived at my house at five; she was alone, on foot, in a deplorable condition, and in a few moments M. de Serbellane came with the greatest secrecy to bid her an adieu, which, alas! will be much longer than they then imagined. I ordered myself to be denied to every body, and particularly to M. d'Ervin's. I desired the servants to say that I was gone to Bellerive, and to make this appear the more probable, all the windows were shut on the side next the court. I was witness for three hours to the most poignant distress. I shed abundance of tears with Theresa, and my spirits were already sufficiently depressed, when they were overwhelmed by the most dreadful calamity.

At the very moment I had prevailed on Theresa and M. de Serbellane to separate, one of my people entered, and told me that a servant of Mad. de Vernon's brought me a note from her, and wanted to speak to me. I went out to see him; judge of the terror which seized me when I beheld M. d'Ervin's! He was already in the next room, and throwing off a great coat in Mad. de Vernon's livery, in which he had wrapped himself for the purpose of disguise, he suddenly rushed forward in spite of my efforts to prevent him, threw himself upon the door of the parlour, opened it, and found M. de Ser-

bellane on his knees before Theresa, with his head resting upon his hand. Theresa first recognised her husband, and fell senseless on the floor; M. de Serbellane raised her in his arms before he perceived M. d'Ervin, thinking that the condition in which he saw Theresa was the effect of her agitation at the thoughts of parting with him. M. d'Ervin seized his wife from the arms of her lover, threw her on a chair, and abandoned her to my assistance; he then turned towards M. de Serbellane, and drew his sword, without observing that his adversary was unarmed. The shrieks which I uttered soon brought my servants about me. M. de Serbellane ordered them to leave the room, and, addressing himself to M. d'Ervin, he said to him, "You appear, sir, to suspect Mad. d'Ervin of wrongs which she has not committed; I was on the point of leaving her; I was begging her to receive my last farewell."

Upon this, M. d'Ervin fell into a fit of passion, which he expressed in a manner at once insolent, contemptible, and extravagantly. Through all his discourse, however, it was easy to see the most determined resolution of fighting M. de Serbellane. I endeavoured to persuade M. d'Ervin that what had passed might be concealed from all the world. From his answers I gathered some circumstances, which I have since been informed of more particularly, that M. de Fierville, who knew the secret, had disclosed the whole affair, and that this more than any other cause stimulated the courage of M. d'Ervin.

M. de Serbellane suffered extremely: I saw in his countenance a conflict of all the generous and all the angry passions which belong to human nature. He stood motionless before a window, biting his lips, listening in silence to the foolish insults of M. d'Ervin, and only casting his eyes now and then on the pale and lifeless countenance of Theresa, as if there he wanted to find motives for restraining his anger.

After having exhausted every effort to pacify M. d'Ervin, I thought of turning his resentment against myself, and endeavoured to persuade him that it was I who engaged Mad. d'Ervin to agree to this interview. Scarcely had I begun to speak, when recollecting what he had before forgotten, that the interview had taken place in my house, he indulged himself in the most insulting reflections on the part I had acted. M. de Serbellane was unable to contain himself any longer, and laying hold of M. d'Ervin by the hand, he said to him, "It is enough, sir it is enough, you have now me only to deal with; I will give you satisfaction." At this moment Theresa recovered her senses. But upon what a scene did she open her eyes! A drawn sword, the fury which was painted on the looks of her lover and of her husband, soon discovered the awful catastrophe with which she was threatened; she threw herself at the feet of M. d'Ervin to implore his mercy.



Upon this, whether being prepared to fight he was the more exasperated against his wife who had reduced him to that necessity, or whether his natural disposition inclined him to take delight in menaces, he declared to her that she might expect the most rigorous treatment; that he was determined to separate her from her daughter; that he intended to shut her up for the rest of her days in a dungeon; and that her shame would be published before the whole universe, since he was about to vindicate his honour by the blood of her lover. This threatening and insolent language threw M. de Serbellane into a paroxysm of rage, the very recollection of which yet makes me shudder: his lips were pale and trembling, and his whole countenance was convulsed. Approaching me, he said, in a low voice, "Observe this man, his doom is fixed: he has just pronounced his own condemnation: I shall lose Theresa for ever, but I shall preserve her liberty, and secure to her the possession of her daughter." At these words, with a motion quicker than thought, he seized M. d'Ervin's by the arm, and left the house.

Theresa and I both followed them; they were already in the street. Theresa, hurrying down stairs, fell a few steps; I raised her, and assisted to carry her to my bed. I then gave orders to Antony, the intelligent valet whom you gave me, to join M. d'Ervin's and M. de Serbellane, and to bring us immediate intelligence of what happened.

During the time we were kept in this state of anxious suspense, I held the unhappy Theresa locked in my arms. Her mind was occupied with only one idea; she had no other fear in the world but of the safety of M. de Serbellane.

Antony at length arrived, and informed us that in the fatal encounter M. d'Ervin's was killed on the spot. Theresa, on hearing it, threw herself on her knees, and exclaimed, "Oh! condemn not to eternal torments the guilty Theresa; grant her time for repentance; her life shall be a continual sacrifice to expiate her crimes, and her last days shall be devoted to the sole object of rendering herself worthy of thy compassion!" And, indeed, since that moment all her ideas seem to be changed: repentance and devotion have taken entire possession of her troubled spirit; she has not permitted me even once to mention the name of her lover.

Antony, after having told us the alarming result of the duel, informed us that it had taken place in the *Champs-Élysées*, almost before Mad. de Vernon's garden. After M. d'Ervin's had fallen, M. de Serbellane observed Antony, and having called him, charged him to tell me, as he was afraid to mention the name of Theresa, that in consequence of what had happened he was obliged to set out instantly for Lisbon, but that he would write to me immediately on his arrival. These

words were overheard by some people who were assembled round the body of M. d'Ervin, and my name only was repeated in the crowd. Antony, if called as an evidence before a court of justice, will give no testimony which can injure the character of Theresa; and my name, if necessary, will be mentioned, and no other. I hope, therefore, I shall save Theresa from the dreadful misfortune of being considered as the cause of the death of her husband.

M. d'Ervin has a brother, who to deprive Theresa of her daughter and of the management of her fortune, may, it is not improbable, from the villany and cruelty of his disposition, accuse her publicly of having incited M. de Serbellane to the murder of her husband. Theresa imparted to me her fears on this subject, which were wholly on account of Isore. We agreed to spread a report that a misunderstanding on politics, which I had endeavoured in vain to reconcile, was the cause of the duel. I only begged Mad. d'Ervin to allow me to intrust Mad. Vernon with the whole circumstances, because she was better able than any other person to direct the public opinion on an affair of this nature, and because she had great influence over M. de Fierville, who seemed to be the only person acquainted with the truth. I at the same time entreated Theresa to give her consent, as a particular proof of friendship for me, that Leonce also should be made the confidant of her secret; I avowed my attachment to him, and upon this Theresa readily yielded to my proposal.

I perhaps encroached too far on her friendship, but dreading the noise which the fatal event might occasion, and afraid that my name might, on the first report, be mentioned in it from malicious motives, I had not the courage thus to hazard the good opinion of Leonce. I fear, I have too many reasons to fear he will condemn my conduct; but I wish, at least, that he should be fully apprized of the motives which led to it. It was also agreed that Mad. d'Ervin should go with me the same evening to my country house, and that we should both remain there for some days, without seeing any person till she received some intelligence from the relations of her husband. A servant entered to tell me that Mad. de Vernon waited on me, and I went to receive her in my closet. I have often observed that, amidst the evils to which human life is exposed, some beneficent care is always at hand to bring support and comfort to the soul when its own strength is ready to fail; and the condition in which I now was, rendered it necessary that, at the close of this melancholy day my spirits should be soothed by some consoling ideas. What affection discovered itself in the behaviour of Mad. de Vernon! With what interest did she question me on all the circumstances of this shock-

ing event! She related to me herself the original cause of all our misfortunes.

Yesterday, in the evening, Mad. du Marsset saw a person in the street, whom she believed to be M. de Serbellane, wrapped up in a cloak, and related what she had seen to M. de Fierville; the latter happening to dine with M. d'Ervins at Saint Germain, asserted that M. de Serbellane had not departed for Portugal that morning as he supposed. It appeared that M. de Fierville said this at first without any bad intention; but he supported it afterwards, notwithstanding the emotion which he observed in the countenance of M. d'Ervins, because he is never restrained by the fear of doing wrong, and delights to set others at variance when he expects to come in for a share in the quarrel.

M. d'Ervins proposed to depart instantly: his eagerness excited the curiosity of M. de Fierville, and he asked leave to accompany him. M. d'Ervins went first to his own house, and not finding his wife at home, he proceeded to my door, where he was refused admittance, being told that I was at Bellerive. But M. de Fierville, having pretended that he had seen my waiting maid, through a lattice, who was working in the house, suggested to M. d'Ervins that it would be a pleasant scheme to go secretly to Mad. de Vernon's, and to give a louis to prevail upon her servant to lend him his great coat. "And will you not shut your door against M. de Fierville?" said I to Mad. de Vernon, with indignation. "Heavens! I assure you," replied she, "he had no thought of the consequences of what he was doing."—"And are not," said I, "an existence without an object, a life without good actions, a heart without feeling, and a head without employment, sufficient to condemn him? Is he not the pest of society, which he pries into without ceasing, and embroils by his mischievous projects?"—"Alas!" said Mad. de Vernon, "we ought to have some indulgence for old age and idleness; but let us leave this alone, and think of your affairs:"—and beginning to talk to me of Leonce, she met with the same confidence, which I wished to repose in her.

What generosity, what feeling did she display in this conversation! She assured me, that for a long time she had been no stranger to my sentiments, but that she wished to know if Leonce really preferred me to her daughter; and that being now fully convinced that this was the case, she would not oppose his inclinations. She did not deny that this breach was extremely painful to her, and she expressed her regret for the disappointment of her daughter with the most affecting sincerity. But the warmth of her friendship soon recalled to her mind the consideration of my interest, and she appeared to console herself with the prospect of the happiness which

awaited me. I could not find language warm enough to express my gratitude; I disclosed to her my fears of the unfavourable reports that might be circulated; and told her how anxious I was to know what effect they would produce on the mind of Leonce. She listened to me with the greatest attention; and, after reflecting a considerable time on what I had said, she added—"I must undertake to speak to him on his arrival, before he has heard the stories which will certainly be told to your disadvantage. He knows that I understand better than any other person how to calm those tempests of a day; I shall be able to quiet his suspicions."—"What!" said I, "will you defend me before him with those unrivalled talents which I have sometimes seen you exert?"—"Do you doubt it?" replied she. The accent with which this was uttered penetrated my heart.

"I wish to write to him," said I, "you will deliver my letter to him."—"Why write to him?" asked she, "your horses are ready for your departure; it is now late; you will not have time to relate the history of all that has happened."—"I feel some repugnance," I replied, "to hazard in a letter the secret of my friend; I will only tell Leonce that I have opened my mind to you, and that you will be able to satisfy him on every particular; and if he express any desire to go to Bellerive, you will have the goodness to tell him that I shall be ready to receive him there."—"Yes," replied she, cheerfully, "you are right; that is better."

I took up the pen, but felt some restraint in writing to Leonce in the presence of Mad. de Vernon. My letter was shorter and more cold than I could have wished it; such as it was, I delivered it to Mad. de Vernon: she read it attentively, sealed it, and observed, that I had expressed myself extremely well, and that I had preserved the dignity which became my character. It belonged to her, she observed, to supply what I had omitted: she endeavoured to banish my doubts; she seemed convinced that she would be able to justify my conduct in the opinion of Leonce; she almost pledged herself to do so; and, appearing to delight in repeating to me what she would say to him, she spoke of me in this indirect form, in a manner so graceful and so winning, and at the same time with so much address, that I blessed Heaven for having inspired me with the idea of intrusting her with my defence. No, there is not a woman in the world who knows better how to promote the interest of those whom she loves. She alone has sufficient knowledge of the world to remove the doubts which may arise in the mind of Leonce, in consequence of the noise occasioned by the fatal event in which my reputation is concerned. Were his first impressions of me unfavourable, the powerful feelings of love and generous pride, which at once

would swell my bosom, would deprive me of the power of asserting my innocence.

I concluded the conversation with entreating Mad. de Vernon to be careful of the reputation of Theresa; not to name any human being but myself; to expose me a thousand times rather than her; and to relate the history of the duel as we had agreed to represent it. She promised to obey me; I embraced her, and we parted. I carried Theresa and her daughter with me, and arrived at Bellerive at three o'clock in the morning. What a day and what a journey! My dear Louisa, I will send this letter to Paris to-morrow, lest the news of the death of M. d'Ervin's should arrive before, and alarm you on my account.

This evening the unhappy Theresa desired to be alone. I walked by the side of the river, and wished to indulge myself with the thoughts of Leonce; but, I know not how, a disquietude, which it gives me pain to acknowledge, made it impossible for me to surrender my mind to these charming illusions. I recollected some stern features in his character, which he painted himself in his letter to M. Barton. I thought I now saw in Leonce not a lover, but a judge; and on thinking of him, I felt a mixed sensation of sadness and dislike. At last, having recollected all that Mad. de Vernon had said to quiet my apprehensions, I persuaded myself that an action which proceeded from a benevolent motive, even though indiscreet, could not destroy the sentiments of esteem which he had expressed for me, and I returned home somewhat comforted by this opinion.

Alas! Theresa, the unfortunate Theresa, she alone is to be pitied! My worthy, my excellent Louisa, how deeply you will be interested in her sorrows, how much you will be disposed to pardon what I have done for her! You at least will not judge with severity even of the errors which spring from pity.

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## LETTER XXXIII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, July 9th.

FOR three days, will you believe it, my dear Louisa, I have not once heard from Mad. de Vernon, nor have I received the least intelligence of Leonce; perhaps he has not yet returned from Mondeville. I have only received a letter from Mad.

d'Artemas, the aunt of Mad. de R. She informs me, that the death of M. d'Ervin is much talked of in Paris, and that many people disapprove of my conduct. She requests me to acquaint her with the real state of the transaction, that she may be able to defend me. But why should I regard what the rest of the world say of me? It is the opinion of Leonce that I wish to know.

I had a mind to go to Paris and speak again to Mad. de Vernon, but I cannot leave Theresa; she has been seized with a fever, accompanied with violent delirium; she wishes to see me every moment! Yesterday I went out of her chamber for a few minutes; she called me, and not finding me beside her, she fell into tears. You cannot conceive how much pain this gave me. No, I will not leave her.

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## LETTER XXXIV.

DELPHINE TO MADemoiselle D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, July 10th.

ANOTHER day has passed without any news, and yet Leonce has arrived; a servant of mine, who returned this evening from Paris, accidentally met one of his. I have descended twenty times in the course of the day into the avenue before my house to look if I could see any person coming. I could only discover the postman at a distance. I at first ran to meet him, but was soon forced to support myself against a tree, and to wait till he approached: the agitation with which I was seized deprived me of the use of my limbs.

I have exhausted every source of information within my reach on the various modes of conveying letters, and the possibility of their being lost. I was ashamed to ask so many questions in the presence of the servants, and at last desisted in despair of learning any thing farther.

It is plain that Mad. de Vernon has not succeeded with Leonce according to her wishes, otherwise she would have informed me as soon as she had spoken to him. She expects she will yet be able to recall his estranged affections; but I will not write to him; no, I will not enter into any justification with him; I will not go to Paris to anticipate his coming hither, and humbly sue for pardon. I may have done wrong, as he thinks; but when I explain to him my motives, when I almost solicit his forgiveness, by employing the intercession of my friend; and when I am here alone, oppressed with grief,

beside the couch of an unfortunate, who sinks under the anguish of repentance and love, it belongs to Leonce to come and seek me.

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## LETTER XXXV.

LEONCE TO HIS MOTHER.

Paris, July 11th.

It is four days, I believe, my dear mother, since I wrote to you from Mondeville, a letter containing sentiments which my heart now entirely disclaims. You were right in choosing Mademoiselle de Vernon for my wife. Mad. de Vernon has transmitted to me a letter from you, which has decided the course I am to pursue; the contract was signed yesterday evening, and I still live; you can desire nothing more.

I shortened my stay at Mondeville; but it was not with a view to this object. On my arrival I was informed that M. de Serbellane had killed M. d'Ervin's in a duel, in consequence of a quarrel on politics at Mad. d'Albemar's house. All Paris resounded with the report of this scandalous transaction. On the very spot where the affair happened M. de Serbellane mentioned the name of Mad. d'Albemar; he was concealed in her house for twenty-four hours before the duel took place, although she told me, on my leaving Paris, that he was on his way to Portugal. In eight days she will set out for Montpellier, from whence she will go to Lisbon, if M. de Serbellane cannot return to France to marry her. She wrote to me herself that Mad. de Vernon would inform me of her whole history. After all, why should I complain? she is free to act as she pleases; but I ought to have known her character. Did you not tell me, my dear mother, that it could never suit with mine? Pardon me that I have ever spoken to you on the subject: forget that I have done so.

I know it, it is unlawful for me to put an end to my own existence; you have a right to dispose of the life which you have given me. I experience no slight emotion at the sacrifice which I am obliged to make; but it is not in vain, that from your blood I have derived the qualities of courage and high spirit; I will show that I possess them; in two days I shall be the husband of Matilda. What will Mad. d'Albemar say to this? what will she think of it?—But why should I ask? It is of no consequence what she thinks; you, madam, shall be obeyed.

Poor Barton has dislocated his arm by a fall from his horse, and is obliged to remain at Mondeville for some time longer: as well as I, he has been cruelly deceived. But can the disappointment be of any consequence to his happiness? Surely not. Adieu, my dear mother.

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## LETTER XXXVI.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, on the night of the 12th July.

THOSE endearing prospects of happiness which I so fondly indulged are now no more. At six o'clock this evening my unfortunate destiny was determined, and at nine I received the fatal letter which informs me of it.—Do I still live? Yes, I flatter myself I shall not die. I shall hasten to join you, however, as soon as Mad. d'Ervins shall be fully re-established in her health. For some hours I have experienced the most painful uneasiness, and have believed myself remarkably ill; but it is one of those illusions only that accompany disappointment and melancholy. Death now can be no addition to my sufferings: life only is necessary to increase my anguish, and to add to my despair.

Only read this letter: I have just made a copy of it for your perusal, but I cannot part with the original; were it removed from my sight only for one moment, I should no longer be convinced of its contents; I should go in quest of Leonce. Yes, I would go and tell him, that I still love, that I still adore him? And is it possible! Shall I no more see him—no more converse with him!

MADAME DE VERNON TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

July 10.

“The pain which I must necessarily give you, my dear Delphine, is to me extremely distressing. I have returned you your letter to Leonce. I spoke to him with the greatest earnestness, and, as you will easily believe, with all the zeal of which friendship is capable; but, alas! he was already so much prejudiced by the noise which this unfortunate adventure has occasioned, that I could make no impression. He pretends that your characters are so very different, that it is



impossible either of you could be happy; that you would continually wound his feelings in a point which he reckons the most sacred and important, a regard for the opinion of the world; and that you could not possibly fail to add to the unhappiness of each other by the opposite feelings and discordant sentiments which would mutually prevail. He had received, besides, a letter from his mother, which positively forbade his marrying you, and called upon him at the same time to fulfil his engagements with my daughter.

"In this respect, however, I wished to leave him at perfect liberty, and to cancel every engagement which his honour might suggest it his duty to fulfil; but he had formed his resolution, and positively refused. As I saw him, therefore, determined never to unite himself to you, I thought it most natural to resume the plans which we had originally formed. In consequence of this arrangement, therefore, the contract between Matilda and Leonce was signed to-day, and the day after to-morrow, at six in the evening, is fixed for the celebration of their nuptials. I could wish to see you before this event takes place, an event which you will easily conceive must be so interesting to the feelings of a mother and a friend. Come to Paris, therefore, to-morrow, and I shall be ready to wait upon you at your own house. Adieu; and be assured, my dear Delphine, that I sincerely sympathize with you in a disappointment so afflicting and so contrary to your wishes."

"SOPHIA DE VERNON."

This letter came to me by post, but ought to have reached me two days sooner. Is it fate, or did Mad. de Vernon wish to spare my tears? Oh! now I am convinced of it, she has coldly espoused my cause. I trusted to the warmth of that friendship which she always professed for me; but, alas! I was mistaken: her affection for her daughter has triumphed over every other sentiment; her arguments in my favour must have been weak and unsupported. But, oh Leonce!—Righteous heaven! was it necessary to justify my conduct to Leonce? Was not the truth alone sufficient to remove every scruple which he could entertain?

This morning, alas! I waked, animated with all the hopes which the tenderest of passions can inspire: nature seemed to me to wear the same pleasing aspect; every object inspired me with pleasure. I could reflect, I could think; my heart was warm with love; I was myself; and he at the same time was hastening to conduct another woman to the altar. He did not even bestow upon me a single sigh; he believed me unworthy of his name! I had even proposed to go this very evening to Leonce; yes, to the husband of Matilda, to ask him the cause of his cruelty, to ask him what motives had

induced him to break our union. But, oh! what shame, what degradation!—To implore him!—to implore a man who believes me degraded in the opinion of mankind! The thought is distracting! It is worse than a thousand deaths;—Let me die then, but let me die immoveably fixed to the spot where I received the fatal blow!

But what have I done that could inspire Leonce with such a sudden, such a deep-rooted aversion? I yielded, it is true, to the compassion which I felt for Theresa; but was this criminal, or is he destitute of feeling? Is he incapable of those emotions which warm the heart with sentiments of pity? or can he be certain that he himself shall never stand in need of the same support? I am sensible that my attentions to that unfortunate woman may be blamed; but is it possible I could have loved with that ardour with which I loved Leonce, and not have a heart accessible to compassion? Are not love and pity derived from the same source!

No, my dear friend, it is not from the motives that actuate my conduct that he forms his opinion; it is from what others say of it: it is the opinion of the world he consults, in order to know what idea to form of me. It is impossible he could ever have made me happy. Impossible!—Ah! Louisa, what do I say! no woman on earth would act as I would have done; I would have studied his temper, and conformed myself to his disposition; I would have consulted him upon every occasion; his wishes, his very thoughts would have been mine. I am certain he loved me, and unless for this unfortunate—Oh! Theresa, you have unhappily destroyed us both!

I have taken care to conceal from her, however, that she is the cause of my disappointment. Has she not already misfortunes enough of her own, without the additional pang which a consciousness of her being the cause of my despair would occasion her? But of the man whom she loves she has at least no reason to complain; it is fate only which separates them. But, Leonce, is it this fate—No, it is your own caprice; it is you yourself, Leonce, who art the cause of our separation. Oh! Louisa! is it certain they are at this moment married? Is it possible? I wish I had positive information. Yes, it is beyond a doubt; they must have been married some hours ago; my destiny is determined, and all is irrevocable.

I am determined to set out for Paris to-morrow; however, I shall see nobody there; I will not even wait upon Mad. de Vernon—What can she have to say to me?—but she will inform me of the hour, the place, the circumstances. Yes, I wish to be able to represent to my imagination an event which will hereafter be the only impression with which my memory

will be conversant. This letter is not enough to complete my wretchedness—I must have other sources of grief, other thoughts, not less distracting indeed, but which may relieve in some measure my present painful anxiety. I have this fatal letter before me at this moment—I examine it incessantly, as if I thought it animated, and capable of answering my eager inquiries.

Indeed, Louisa, you had good reason to be afraid of the world for your unfortunate Delphine: you see how my soul is overwhelmed with distress: my peace, my tranquillity is fled for ever. The tempest has proved superior to my utmost exertions. You, who I am persuaded still love me, will pardon my weakness: but really I believe that I can no longer survive. I tremble at the very idea of society, and solitude appears to me still more painful. No more shall this vain world inspire me with joy; no more shall it afford me any place to enjoy repose.

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## LETTER XXXVII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, July 13, at midnight.

My dear Louisa, he was not married yesterday: No, he is not yet married!—Merciful heaven! at this moment alone, abandoned by all that I held dear, shall I tell you what my despair will scarcely yet permit me to believe? Listen to my story.—If I recollect what I have seen, what I have suffered, my reason, my understanding is not yet quite gone.

It was impossible for me to remain longer at Bellerive; the inactivity of the body, when the soul is tortured by a diversity of passions, is a punishment which nature is unable to support. I therefore got into my carriage, and gave orders to drive me to Paris, without having formed any positive design, and without any determinate idea which it was possible for me to avoid, even to myself. I still felt, not hope indeed, but a something however which is very different from those sensations, which positive information is calculated to create. In spite of reflection my ideas were fluctuating, and I had even got the length of doubting the veracity of my information.

In the course of our journey I contemplated the various objects that passed before me with that fixed but indiscrimi-

nating attention which enables us to distinguish nothing. An old man upon the road, however, attracted my notice: I made the carriage stop, in order to give him some money. This exertion of charity did not proceed, I am persuaded, from benevolent motives only—it was inspired, I believe, by the confused and indistinct idea that a charitable action might perhaps avert the calamity with which I was threatened. I could not help sighing upon the discovery that there still remained in my bosom some gleams of hope, and upon perceiving that I had not yet reached the summit of my affliction. I fell prostrate in my carriage; but I had neither strength nor courage to pray; and in this situation I reached the end of my journey, with an anxiety and anguish I cannot possibly express.

Antoine was at home, but I had not courage to put any direct question to him; I spoke something, however, concerning Mad. de Vernon; a word which I knew would necessarily lead him to talk of her.—“My lady, no doubt,” answered he, “is come to town to be present at the marriage of Mademoiselle Matilda to M. de Mondeville—it is at six o’clock, at St. Maria’s, near Chaillot, at the farther end of the suburbs, in the church of the convent where Mademoiselle de Vernon was educated.—It is not five; my lady has time enough to dress.” Oh, Louisa! he was not yet her husband! I was not even more than fifty paces from him. I could have gone and thrown myself at his gate, where his carriage might have passed over my heart before the celebration of his marriage could have been accomplished.

Never did an hour give birth to such a diversity of thoughts, to so many different schemes, that were no sooner adopted than instantly rejected. Twenty times I felt myself inclined to hazard every thing, in order to speak to him once more before he had pronounced the fatal, the eternal vow; and twenty times my pride or my timidity damped the ardour of my resolution, and confined within my own bosom the passion that consumed me. “What will Leonce,” said I to myself, “whom my folly and imprudence have alienated from me, what will he think of an action so rash and inconsiderate? Why should I subject myself to the painful humiliation of having my entreaties, my tears, rejected, and of afterwards beholding him approach the altar to crown another with that felicity for which I was so anxious.

This melancholy reflection prevented me from putting in execution what I had resolved; but, alas! the recollection of those days when he fondly loved me, strongly resisted this temporary impression. During this severe conflict I beheld the hour rolling away, and the hand of time ready to decide my irrevocable destiny.

I know not from what motive, I formed all at once a fixed determination, the idea of which afforded me at first considerable consolation. I determined myself to go incognita to this church where the marriage ceremony was to be performed, and thus to be a witness of their vows. What could be my motive for this conduct I am as yet unable to conceive: I had no design, I am certain, to oppose their marriage, nor, even had I this design, had I courage enough to entail upon myself the shame and disgrace which a measure so extraordinary would necessarily occasion. I thought, I believe, that I should fall a victim to the internal conflict to which this spectacle would give rise, and thus terminate at once both my life and sorrows. It is more probable, however, that reflection had no share in the direction of my conduct: grief pursued me, and I was eager to fly from its incessant persecution.

I went out without attendants, without giving any notice, and so disguised by a veil and white robe, that it was not possible I could be known even at my own gate. I was surprised at the rapidity with which I moved along the streets; I cannot even conceive how I acquired so much strength; but there was certainly something convulsive in the efforts I made; for I saw the people who passed me turn suddenly, and gaze at me as an object that appeared to them remarkable. The agitation of my mind, however, continued to support me. I was afraid I should not arrive in time to witness the ceremony; I was eager in the pursuit of feelings which could add only to my distress; I imagined that by reaching the summit of my misery, either my head or heart would fail me, and that thus I should terminate my sorrows, and bury my restless and painful anxiety in perpetual oblivion.

In this uneasy and distracted condition I entered the church. The coolness and solemnity of the place for some moments calmed my agitation. Very few people had assembled; I had it, therefore, in my power to select what place I thought most convenient for my purpose, and accordingly seated myself behind a pillar, which, while it prevented me from being seen, permitted me at the same time to have a full view of any thing that passed. I observed some old women in the body of the church, who were praying with recollection and fervour, and was involuntary led to contrast the calm tranquillity of their situation with the agitation and turbulence that were the painful inmates of my bosom. I looked with horror on the youth I enjoyed, and which served only as an easy vehicle to communicate to my heart that restless and uneasy sensibility that accompanies early misfortune.

The instruments of joy were now heard from without; their animating echoes announced the arrival of Leonce. Soon, also, the organs of the church began to welcome his approach,

while my heart alone seemed to mingle despair with this tumult of joy. This combination of music produced upon my senses an effect that appeared to me wholly supernatural. At one place, where I understood distinctly the air they were playing, imagination represented to me that this was my last, my funeral song. I listened with the most exalted enthusiasm, and burst, at last, into a torrent of tears. This deep emotion, I believe, was a merciful relief sent me from Heaven. I instantaneously experienced an elevation of soul which supported and reanimated my dejected spirits. The idea of the Supreme Being took possession of my whole soul; I felt myself relieved from self-accusation, and proudly gloried in my own integrity and innocence. "No," said I to myself, "I am not criminal; and, though deprived of every blessing, the approbation of my own conscience, the aids of a merciful Providence, will still afford me consolation. I shall spend my days in grief; but no self-reproach, no remorse, shall mingle with my tears, and in death I shall behold only a relief from my woes." Ah, Louisa! how much do I stand in need of such repose!

I had not yet had courage to raise my eyes! but when the sounds of the music had ceased, my elevation, my enthusiasm, were no more. That distracting grief, which they had only suspended for a moment, again returned with renewed violence. By the blaze of the flambeaux I beheld Leonce—Gracious heaven! it was for the last time! He gave his hand to Matilda: she appeared charming, for she was happy, while I, alas! overwhelmed in tears, could inspire no sentiment but those of compassion.

Leonce appeared to me—it was perhaps an illusion, suggested by my disordered fancy; but he really appeared to me to be plunged in the deepest melancholy: his features seemed to be altered, while his eyes wandered unmeaningly over the church as if anxious to avoid those of Matilda. The priest began his exhortations; but when he turned to Leonce, to address him upon the love and affection due to a wife, Leonce heaved a deep sigh, and his head fell motionless upon his bosom.

Yes—I will venture to tell you it. A moment after this, I thought I saw his eyes eagerly in quest of my figure, as I supported myself under the shade of the column, and I pronounced, in my delirium, these words, in a whispering voice; "Oh, Leonce! it was to Delphine that this affection was promised: yes, Leonce owes it to Delphine, and she has never yet ceased to deserve it." He certainly could not hear me, and yet he was visibly disturbed. Mad. de Vernon arose to speak to him; she interrupted my view of him; he still advanced, however, to look towards me, and his shadow was once more described upon the column.

I heard the solemn question which was about to decide my fate; an icy coldness seized my whole frame; I bent forward; I extended my hand; but soon overawed by the sanctity of the place, by the awful and universal silence, and by the noise and consternation that my appearance would create, I made an effort to withdraw, and fell senseless behind the column. From that moment I was ignorant of what passed; I did not hear the fatal, the irrevocable *yes*; the cold hand of death saved me that intolerable anguish.

At ten o'clock, the keeper of the church at the very moment he was going to shut it up, beheld a female lying extended on the marble pavement. He approached, and raised me; he carried me to the open air, and at last restored to me this painful and melancholy fever, which they denominate life. I was carried home, and found my domestics in the utmost anxiety and impatience; and, good heavens, when I consider for what!—They wept for joy at my return.

After a stupid insensibility of three hours, I have at last found strength enough to write to you. Oh, Louisa! my only friend, send for me, and snatch me from this tormenting place. All here is gaiety and happiness: what have I to do in this region of joy, so different, so discordant with my feelings? Perhaps the air which you breathe, the place which you inhabit, will recall those delightful ideas that so long constituted my happiness. Could one year only be erased from my life!—one single day only! Ah, Louisa! it is that day only which shall never be erased from my memory.

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## LETTER XXXVIII.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, July 14.

I INFORMED you of my resolution; I was irrevocably determined. Know, then, that I am now married—yes, married yesterday to Matilda. I spared you the uneasiness which a relation of my sufferings would have caused you; for why mingle with your own disquietudes those that arise from sympathy and friendship? But I must, however, unless I am completely lost to feeling, avow to you one circumstance, which will certainly astonish you; and what will you say of me, if this secret which I find it impossible to keep, be only a dream, a mere phantom, the child of a disordered imagination? Alas! what

is become of your wretched friend? You see into what a gulf of misery she has plunged me by her baseness and perfidy.

I knew yesterday that Madlle. d'Albemar was at Bellerive, busy in preparing for her departure for Lisbon. Well, I have told you that I knew it. In the midst of that disgusting ceremony, however, which was about to determine for ever my destiny; in this church, where pride, where duty, where the inclination of my mother had forcibly dragged me, I imagined that I saw behind a pillar, Madlle. d'Albemar, covered with a white veil, but so altered and so pale, that death alone could have produced such a change. The more eagerly I fixed my eyes on this pillow my illusion became the stronger, till I actually believed that I heard my own name and hers pronounced in conjunction by her voice; a voice, it is true, which I often fancy I hear when solitary and alone.

Mad. de Vernon came up to me, and gently reminded me of my duty to Matilda; I arose to pronounce the irrevocable oath, at the same moment I beheld this shade advance: it stretched forth its hand, and my distress was such, that a dim cloud overspread my eyes, and deprived me of every sensation but those of astonishment and horror. I made another effort, however, to examine this column, from which I imagined the persecuting image had proceeded; but I no longer perceived any thing. The effect of the lights in this wide and open church, together with my disordered imagination, must, no doubt, have given birth to this visionary phantom.

My silence and distress, however, embarrassed Matilda; I hastened to pronounce the important and emphatic *yes*, lost as I was in the mazes of a wild and deep reverie. My whole soul was otherwise engaged; but it is of no consequence, the knot is tied, and I am now the husband of Matilda. Were it even true, that Delphine for a few moments really loved me, yet she has seen, I make no doubt, after what has happened, the propriety of marrying M. de Serbellane. Could I only be assured that she regrets me!—Oh, Barton! what unworthy, what unmanly weakness! Delphine has deceived me; and shall I henceforth believe that there is any such thing as truth in nature.

You can now judge if it be possible for me to recollect those days without madness, without sorrow. You now know all that has passed. But this visionary—this white phantom; what could it be? I still see it—Oh, my dear friend! come to me as soon as you are well; I have now more need of you than in the weak and feeble days of my infancy. My reason is quite enfeebled, and I possess nothing that characterizes man but the violence of his passions.



## LETTER XXXIX.

MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, July 20, 1790.

AFTER the receipt of your letter, I passed the whole day in tears, and my eyes are so wearied with weeping, that I can now scarcely see well enough to write to you. My dear child, to what troubles have you not been exposed! Alas! why was not I with you, why was not I enabled to express my hatred for the wicked, and to administer consolation to goodness in distress! I had conceived an esteem for Leonce; I looked upon him as your intended husband, and as a friend worthy of your attachment; yet he has been capable of such cruelty; he has voluntarily renounced the most amiable woman in the world, because he had room to reproach her with an error, of which the noblest virtues were the cause, and which even angels would commit, were they to witness the weakness and sufferings incident to human nature. It may be supposed, that Madame de Vernon did not exert herself to defend your conduct: to speak more plainly, I am inclined to suspect her of having aggravated a circumstance, which it was her duty to justify; but this forms no reasonable apology for the conduct of Leonce. Was it requisite for him, whom you have condescended to prefer before all others, to be guided by an indifferent person, in his opinion of your merit? No,—he never loved you—you must forget him for ever, and fortify your soul with the conscious sentiment of your own worth. Life, my dear Delphine, is never over at the age of twenty; at that early period, nature comes seasonably to the relief of misfortunes, the moral faculties are still improving, and it is only in the decline of our days, that troubles insurmountable and insupportable will overwhelm us.

Let me presume to advise you, on this occasion—quit the busy world for a short time, and come to live with me: I have but an indistinct idea of this world; but I am persuaded, that all the good qualities of the heart and understanding are not of themselves sufficient to secure us a peaceful life. To keep well with the world, a certain science is requisite, which, indeed, is not altogether criminal; but which, however, presupposes a too early insight into vice, and a certain degree of that distrust, which the conduct of mankind must reasonably inspire. Your understanding is most comprehensive; but your heart is too young, and too susceptible of tender impressions;

you ought, therefore, to shelter your sensibility under the shade of solitude; and, having acquired fresh strength in your retirement, to return once more to the commerce of the world. If you still continue to be attached to it, the evils you have experienced will become for ever incurable.

Come and enjoy the unruffled calm of retirement, tranquilize yourself by the absence of disagreeable objects, and the momentary suspension of every new emotion. A picture like this is void of gaudy colouring; but, in course of time, a sameness of situation produces its benefit; and if the consolations it makes us derive from ourselves alone, are not rapid in succession, they have at least the merit of being durable in their effects.

I do not now speak to you of my own affection; it is with diffidence I mention it when the pangs of love are the subject; however, on some occasions, I hope your tender heart may still find relief and repose in my attachment.

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## LETTER XL.

DELPHINE IN ANSWER TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, July 26, 1790.

Yes—I am determined to rejoin you, and that for ever; but still, how can you say, that he never loved me? I know well, that I have no prospect in the future; but why deprive me of the pleasures of the past?

From his deportment at the concert, at the ball, and the last time I saw him, I am convinced that he loved me. These tender recollections have been constantly present to my mind, these twelve days past; his words, his looks, his accents, on which I hung with unabated ardour, and which gave me every assurance of his affection: he loved, and I was not engaged, and he is now the husband of another. This is the sum of my misery; the cruel circle which my sorrows trace around me, and which bitter recollections will never suffer me to pass. Since that fatal day, on which I ought to have expired, I have seen nobody but Theresa; I have not answered the letters of Madame de Vernon, and I sent her word that I could not see her; even you yourself could not have given me relief.

I fancy that I shall be able to regain my empire over myself; but as for happiness, your reason will tell you, that it is no longer to be my portion. You do not imagine that I can

ever love any man but Leonce; you do not imagine, that I can ever forget the resistless charm, which for the first time in my life inspired me with the tender passion. Strange! that the fate of a woman should be determined, when she has not married the object of her affections: the world leaves only one hope in the destiny of the sex, and when their lot is drawn, and disappointment ensues, the matter is finally and irrecoverably settled. All farther efforts are ineffectual, and even attended with a degradation of character; when indulging the fond hope of retrieving an irreparable injury, they engage in a vain struggle with their destiny, which only keeps in restless agitation the precious moments of youth, and deprives declining years of the recollection of virtuous actions—the only glory of old age, and of the tomb. What then is to be done, when some cause, either unknown to us, or even reasonably founded, deprives us of the greatest of all blessings—that is, of a marriage of love? What is to be done, when we are condemned to eternal exclusion from this blessing? Must we extinguish every feeling, and become a prey to total insensibility, like so many beings, who say that they find themselves at ease! Must every emotion of the soul be suppressed, which promises happiness, but which a prevailing fatality destroys! In this painful struggle, I have almost succeeded, but at the expense of every good quality I possessed. I know this to be the case; yet how trivial is the loss! but for whom shall I henceforth endeavour to preserve a single amiable qualification?

I am now less intimate with Theresa; I have an air of constraint in my conversation and deportment, which excites in me a sort of disgust for myself. Failings like these become me, for has not Leonce deemed me unworthy of him, and why should he not have reason on his side? You are desirous, my dear Louisa, that I should return to you; but will you be able to recognise me? I have imposed a laborious task upon myself, which has strangely altered every attraction I possessed; and was it not expedient to arm my mind against the evils which I endure? To awake without hope, to drag every minute of the long day like a painful burden, to find no longer any interest in my habitual occupations, to look upon nature without pleasure, and the future without a plan—good heavens! what a destiny! and if I give way to my grief, would you imagine what idea, what unworthy idea fills my mind? the necessity of coming to an explanation with Leonce.

I fancy to myself, that I could say a few words to him, that might amply avenge my cause—but to what purpose should I attempt to seek revenge? Pride alone can preserve me any remnant of his esteem. Yet, can he avoid desiring

to see me? It is in my power to refuse that favour; I ought and will refuse it.

What has ruined me, my Louisa, is a too great facility of character. I now feel an admiration for the qualities, and even the faults which procure an ascendancy over other minds. I love and prize coldness, disdain, and resentment. Leonce shall see if I cannot resemble him—What shall he see? Alas! he considers me no more; while I am agitated with passion, he reposes in the calm of indifference. My life is in no sense connected with his; he continues his journey, and leaves me behind, having seen me with indifference fall from his car in his victorious career.

You speak to me of retirement—Indeed I hold the world in abhorrence, but solitude is likewise odious to me.

In the gloom which surrounds me, I am haunted with the idea, that not one person on earth feels interested in my fate. Not one—pardon me, it was Leonce alone I thought of—fatal sentiment, which tears my heart, and leaves no room for the tender passions which once possessed it. It is for you, my dear sister, it is for you alone I strive to live. With respect to Madame de Vernon, whom I loved so tenderly, she only excites sentiments of sorrow and aversion;—from my heart, I vent the bitterest reproaches against her, which alas! perhaps Leonce only justly merits. Let me, however, beware of injustice, the first crime of the unfortunate. As Madame de Vernon is desirous of seeing me, I will receive her; she writes me word, that my refusal afflicts her. I do not wish to give her any uneasiness; perhaps when I see her, she will regain her former influence over me. I seek in vain for an interesting circumstance, an agreeable moment, as if invoking Heaven for the greatest blessings of existence. I am inclined to imagine that a cessation from sorrow is impossible, and that nothing but grief and misfortune exist in the world.

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## LETTER XLI.

DELPHINE TO MADemoiselle D'ALBEMAR.

July 30.

I HAVE seen Madame de Vernon; she came to pass two days at Bellerive. I was walking alone on my terrace, when I perceived her at a distance. At sight of her, I was seized with such a tremor, that, to prevent myself from falling, I

hastened to sit down. Upon her approach, however, I recovered myself; a sentiment of pride and irritation sustained my spirits, and I rose to meet her, in order to conceal my confusion.

Every feature of her countenance was marked with sorrow and melancholy. We both remained silent for some time; at last, she began by informing me, that her daughter was on the point of quitting her, and going to establish herself with her husband in a separate house. I asked her if this plan originated with herself—"No," replied she, "on the contrary, it deranges my circumstances, and terminates the hopes I had formed of being surrounded by my family; but who can reasonably indulge the hopes of happiness?"—I sighed—"You have made, however, many sacrifices for the welfare of your daughter," said I, with some severity; "she, at least, owes you the debt of gratitude."—"You accuse me"—(replied she, after some moments of reflection)—"you accuse me of having made a poor defence of you to Leonce. I am willing to deserve this reproach; yet, I assure you, his resentment was not to be appeased; your enemies had prejudiced him against you, before I saw him; the reprehensions you had encountered, had shocked his respect for the public opinion; and both your characters are so repugnant, that you must inevitably have been unhappy together." "Did I commission you to judge our difference," replied I, "and did you not accept, or rather canvass for the office of my justification?" "You likewise," cried she, "you too are desirous of forsaking me; you are more entitled to do so than my daughter, and I resign myself to my lot without a struggle." Having said these words, she sat down; I saw her turn pale, and tremble; at first, I confess without any emotion on my part; for I have suffered so much for this week past, that my heart has become less sensible to the afflictions of others; yet when she shed tears, I perceived myself affected; I took her by the hand, and requested her to justify her conduct. She remained silent, and continued to weep without making me any reply.

It was the first time in my life that I beheld her in this state, and the tender recollections of our former intimacy pleaded her cause in my heart. "Well, Madame de Vernon," said I, "I can still love you sufficiently, to pardon you for the misery that must attend me through life; you have done me no service with Leonce, but it was his heart that ought to have pleaded my cause; it was he who ought to have known how to make the best apology for me, he who was the object of my affections, and who was firmly persuaded of my attachment to him: but yet how could you bring yourself to precipitate his marriage?" Was not my consent necessary, after the confession I had made to you? You are a mother: did not I

become your daughter, by intrusting you with the depository of my happiness? "Yes," said she, with a sigh, "you are my daughter, and still dearer to me than a daughter; I confess myself guilty, I acknowledge my fault;" at the same time her paleness increased, and the changes of her countenance became more frequent and remarkable. I was moved with this affecting spectacle, and threw myself into her arms with these words:—"I freely forgive you; if my death must be the consequence, remember that I have forgiven you." She fixed her eyes on me with the deepest emotion, and actually seemed on the point of throwing herself at my feet, but recovering herself on a sudden, she rose, and requested my permission to retire, and take a solitary walk for a few moments.

When she was at a distance, I came to a determination to question her on every circumstance that took place during my absence. Upon her return, I endeavoured to do so; but this conversation was extremely irksome to her. As for myself, I was kept in a state of painful hesitation, between the eagerness with which I devoured her replies, and the sentiment of compassion for her sufferings, which made me reluctant to insist on the particulars of her details. If she attempted to deceive me by a false display of her dexterity, our connexion was dissolved for ever; yet she painted every circumstance with so much truth, and developed the gradual shades of her secret desires in favour of her daughter, with the diligent performance of the task that I had imposed on her, in a manner so satisfactory, that she maintained over me the absolute ascendancy of truth. I condemned her in secret, but I loved her still; and as her manners were natural and unaffected, her influence continued as before. She confessed to me, but not without confusion, that she had actually pressed Leonce to conclude a match with her daughter; but she assured me, that he had made up his mind never to marry me, after the bustle occasioned by the duel with M. de Serbellane. He was convinced, she said, that the world would finally discover, that I had brought together a lady and her lover, at my house, without the knowledge of her husband; and that, as the death of M. d'Ervin was the consequence, it was a circumstance which I must not expect the world to forgive. The specious pretext of political opinions, under which this unfortunate accident was cloaked, was more displeasing to him than the naked truth itself. To conclude, Madame de Vernon added, that Leonce had received a letter from his mother, conceived in the strongest terms against me; and frequently repeated, that my destiny must have been very unhappy with two persons, who would have regarded most of my good qualities in the light of faults.

I rejected, with disdain, such disagreeable topics of consolation; nor could I see with what propriety they came from her. I liked still less her repeated counsels to avoid Leonce, and to go to pass some time with you, until he should set out for Spain, according to his design. In this respect, her counsels harmonized with my own resolutions; but I had not resigned to Madame de Vernon the privilege of directing my conduct. It was, in a manner, in spite of all my resolution, that I was captivated by her gentleness and grace.

In the course of this conversation, I asked her, if Leonce had not imagined, that I took too lively an interest in the fate of M. de Serbellane; but she repelled with great ease an insinuation which might have been agreeable to me. In reality, the transient jealousy with which M. de Serbellane inspired Leonce, was entirely done away, by his consciousness of the secret of Madame d'Ervin's. No, Louisa, I have no longer any sentiment on which my heart may repose with confidence.

Madame de Vernon afterwards spoke to me concerning Matilda and Leonce. He does not love her, said she: since their marriage, he seldom sees her, and with reluctance: but she is better calculated for him than any other woman, because she will never give the world room to talk about her; and such should be the disposition of the wife of a man so feelingly alive to the slightest censure. As for Matilda, she will love Leonce with all the powers of her soul; nor will she entertain any doubt of the reciprocal affection of her husband: such is her confidence in the general influence of a sense of duty. She is not apt to make observations on his conduct, and she passes the best part of the day in the practice of devotion. She will not be very discriminating in point of jealousy; but if any striking circumstances should discover the attachment of Leonce for another woman, she would then be as violent as she is now calm; and, from the stiff starchness of her mind, and the inflexibility of her principles, she would no longer be permitted to enjoy a moment of repose.

"Alas!" said I, "it shall not be Delphine who will disturb her peace. There is nothing to be dreaded from me—Am I not a sacrificed, ruined being? Alas! Sophia, was it kind in you?—But let us say no more on the subject of Leonce. Let me taste the only pleasure of which my soul is still susceptible,—the pleasure of your conversation."

Madame de Vernon wished to see Madame d'Ervin's, which the latter refused. As Theresa did not appear, while Madame de Vernon was at Bellerive, I passed two days in her company. I acknowledge, that, on the second day, I felt some consolation; for there is an inexpressible charm in the society of Madame de Vernon, which secures my attachment to her: she does not

now inspire me with a perfect esteem, nor is my confidence in her unlimited as before; but her gracefulness enchants me, and when I am with her, I think she loves me: I am less dejected in her presence; nor can I listen to her for hours, without a confused idea, that she has imparted to me a consolation which I had no reason to expect. But, alas! the illusion was of short duration! When Madame de Vernon departed, I found myself worse than I was before her arrival: the relief she had communicated to me left no lasting impression on my heart.

What a scene of trouble and confusion in my soul! What subversion and instability in my ideas and sentiments! For what purpose, or with what hopes, must I invent for myself a new turn of mind, a new method of existence! I float in the most afflicting uncertainty, between what I was before, and what I am now wishing to become. Grief, grief alone is firmly established with me: it is in the bosom of grief only, that I am able to recollect myself. My plans vary; my designs clash with each other; my misery is still the same. I am wretched, and [change] my resolutions only to increase my wretchedness. Louisa, ought we to live, when we are under apprehensions of every hour, every day that approaches, as bringing with them a long train of bitter and tormenting meditations? If time alone does not alleviate my sufferings, does not every source of consolation disappear? The true secret of reason is to await the lenient hand of time; but whosoever waits in vain, has no resource but in death alone.

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## LETTER XLII.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, August 5.

You desire to know how I pass my life with Matilda— My life! My life, my friend, is not in that direction. I walk in solitary silence the whole day, and Matilda gives herself no concern on that account. She goes to mass, she sees her bishop, her nuns, and what not! In a word, she is very well. When we meet, politeness and gentleness pass with her for sentiment: she is perfectly content, and loves me not the less. The daughter of her who, above any other woman in the world, possesses the greatest quickness and penetration, and versatility of disposition, goes right forward in the line which



is marked for her, without ever comprehending only what is directly addressed to her observation. It is much better so—I must not make her miserable. Her understanding is a matter of no moment with me, since I never communicate my thoughts to her.

We shall proceed hand in hand on the path that leads to the grave; on that path on which we are doomed to travel together. Our journey will be silent and gloomy like its end; but why therefore be in grief? A single being in the world has changed into the outward pomp of joy, that funeral feast of death, which men call marriage; but that being was guilty of perfidy, and an abyss has separated us for ever.

My dear friend, I wish to avenge M. d'Ervin's.—Why should M. de Serbellane be in existence after having killed a man? Has he killed this d'Ervin's only? Just heavens! am I still alive? I am not perfectly satisfied with the state of my interior; my head is apt to be disordered occasionally. Anger, above every thing else, torments me continually: an irritability which you have contributed to diminish, allows me not a moment of repose. I have not a single sentiment of softness about me. If I think of the possibility of meeting her, I indulge the pleasing idea of addressing her with insult: I have no longer any gentleness in my disposition; but now I have less occasion for it. Delphine was remarkable for the sweetness of her temper, and I am determined to resemble her no more.

Some new circumstance increases my ill-humour every day. I was rather surprised, that the departure of Madame d'Albemar had not taken place. I could not help remarking the visit Madame d'Ervin's made to her, and this visit I considered a sort of excuse for her conduct. I figured to myself that she had not espoused the cause of M. de Serbellane with too much warmth and extravagance, since the wife of M. d'Ervin's had chosen her house for an asylum: and though this circumstance has made no change in the relation of Madame d'Albemar, and Monsieur de Serbellane, for these twenty-fours, which Madame d'Ervin's passed at her house; yet, unhappy man as I am! I felt my resentment appeased. Yesterday, however, on going to my banker's on some business, I found that he received two letters in my presence from M. de Serbellane to Madame d'Albemar, which he despatched to her that instant, making a pleasantry on her sending several times to inquire if those letters had arrived. I could learn nothing from this incident; but I could expect nothing else, having acted like a fool the whole day. You desire to know, likewise, if Matilda and I live with Madame de Vernon. Matilda wishes for a separate establishment; she loves to be independent in her domestic arrangements; and, moreover, her mother's manner of

living is not suitable to her taste. Madame de Vernon goes to bed late, delights in gambling, and sees a deal of company. Matilda is eager to regulate her time according to her principles of devotion. I leave her at perfect liberty to determine as most agreeable to herself; for, in my present state, I am incapable of coming to any determination on any subject whatsoever. I remark nothing, I perceive a difference in nothing, I have only one thought which preys on me, and am constantly endeavouring to conceal it from the world. This is a true picture of what passes within me.

I remarked, however, that Madame de Vernon was more affected by the determination of her daughter, than I should have expected from a woman of her known firmness. She pronounced, with a feeble, faltering voice, these words: "Separation and forgetfulness;" but she soon recovered that careless and indifferent mien, with which she knows so well how to conceal her emotions. "Do as you like, daughter," were her words; "people ought not to live together longer than their mutual happiness requires:" and, having finished these words, she walked out of the apartment. Singular woman! except on one fatal day, she never spoke to me with frankness and with warmth, on any subject whatsoever; but, on that day, she maintained an absolute ascendancy over me. Alas! the sensations of resentment and humiliation which her words excited in me, are deeply impressed on my memory. I beseech you, never to request me to reveal them to you, nor even speak to me upon this subject. I am bound to eternal silence; nor can I ever impart the secret to you. I am now preparing to go to Spain on a visit to my mother; I shall remove myself from this quarter; I have informed Matilda of my design, and intend departing in a month, or sooner perhaps, when I shall be certain not to meet Madame d'Albemar on the road.

A friend of mine has assured me, that Madame de Vernon was much involved in debt. It is very probable; the precipitation with which I have signed the settlements, did not allow me to make any inquiries into her circumstances. If Madame de Vernon is incumbered with debts, it is the duty of a daughter to see them paid; and on this supposition my marriage with Matilda may ruin me totally. Well! this is a satisfactory contemplation! Madame d'Albemar will then have heaped every description of calamity on my head; but she will not, perhaps, be conscious, that by uniting my destiny with another person, I have cut myself off from any future enjoyment in life, or even the prospect of spending my days in tranquillity and peace. She will not believe—But, fool that I am, to imagine she thinks of me! does she not write to M. de Ser-

bellane, and receive his letters in reply? Is she not going to meet him? Alas! how much I suffer! Farewell.

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## LETTER XLIII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, August 4.

SINCE the earliest period of my existence, you are sensible, my dear sister, that the idea of an all-powerful and merciful Deity has been constantly present to my mind. From this consolatory idea, however, I have derived no succour in the present moment of affliction and despair. The bitter sensation of the injustice which I have experienced concurring with the anguish of my heart, I refused admittance to those pleasing emotions, which prepare the way for the returning empire of religious sentiments. By ceasing to struggle with my natural disposition, I recovered my former habit of mind, and yesterday I experienced some moments of calmness and repose.

Towards evening, I went down to my garden, and meditated for some time, and with some austerity, on the fate which attends souls endued with sensibility in the intercourse of the world. I endeavoured to suppress the sentiment of tenderness which the image of Leonce revived in my heart, and I was willing to confound him with the number of unjust and cruel men who are eager to tear the heart which surrenders to their attacks. I strove to subdue those youthful and tender sentiments, the charms of which I have felt from early infancy.

Life, said I, is a task of labour which requires courage, and conduct.

On the summit of the mountains, at the extremity of the horizon, the thoughts of man seek for a future state, for another world, where the soul may finally repose, where goodness may enjoy the contemplation of itself, where love, in fine, may never be transformed into the bitter suspicions of jealousy, or the mournful sensations of despair. But in the actual state of things, in this palpable existence, whose pressure we feel on every side, in order to preserve a proper dignity of conduct, and a proud superiority of character and spirit, it is incumbent on us to resist the natural bias to confidence and affection, to rouse the heart when it sinks into weakness, and to lock up within our bosoms those unhappy tendencies, which make us hazard, on the sentiments with which we inspire others, the possession of every comfort and happiness through

life. I shall establish for myself, said I again, a fixed and uniform destiny, inaccessible to joy as well as to grief. The days, which are counted to me, shall be filled only by my duties. Above all, I shall endeavour to preserve myself from that fatal reverie which plunges the soul into the gulf of vain hopes and lamentations, which at first bestows a sensation of tranquillity and pleasure, but terminates with sorrow and remorse.

We seem attracted by a supernatural power, which presents a glimpse of happiness through a cloud: the cloud becomes illumined by degrees, and at last discovers an abyss, where we imagined we beheld an endless path of virtue and of bliss.

“Yes”—I continued to repeat, “I will suppress within myself every idea which distinguished me from other women—natural sentiments, impassioned emotions, generous sallies of enthusiasm; but still I must shun grief, odious and dreadful grief. My existence shall be entirely concentrated in my reason, and I shall pass through life armed cap-a-pie against others and against myself.” Without interrupting these reflections, I got up, and walked with a firmer step, and with more confidence in my own strength. I stopped near the orange-trees which you sent me from Provence; their delicious odours recalled to my remembrance my native country, where these plants grow in abundance in the middle of our gardens. In that instant, one of those organs, such as I have so often heard in Languedoc, passed along the road, playing one of the airs to which I used to dance in my childhood. I wished to retire, but an irresistible charm detained me; I traced back in memory all the recollections of my early years, your affection for me, the benevolent protection with which your brother shielded my growing youth, the sweet and satisfactory notion I then formed of my own lot, and of society in general. Then I was firmly persuaded that it was sufficient only to be amiable and good, in order that every heart should expand itself at your approach, and that the commerce of the world should consist only of the continued barter of gratitude and affection. Alas! in comparing these delightful allusions with the actual disposition of my soul, I burst into floods of tears, I threw myself on the ground, and sobbed with such violence, that I imagined that I should be suffocated; I prayed that the earth would open its fertile bosom and close me in eternal rest. Upon raising myself again, I perceived the glittering stars, and the calm and beautiful expanse of Heaven—O God, cried I, thou art there, in that sublime habitation, so worthy of thy omnipotence, and thy sovereign goodness! Are the sufferings of a solitary being lost in this immensity of space? or are thy paternal regards fixed on them, to alleviate them, and make them subservient to virtue? No—thou art not indifferent to the voice of grief, which reveals the secret of the uni-

verse—Assist me, Great God! assist me. Alas! for having merely loved, I have not deserved to be forgotten by thee. No creature, during the small number of years which I have passed on the earth, has ever suffered through my means; thou hast never heard a complaint which was caused by my existence. Until this day, I have been an innocent creature; why, then, wilt thou deliver me over to such cruel torments? In pronouncing these words, my dear Louisa, I felt compassion for myself, and a sentiment of this nature is not without its charms.

A more powerful succour now penetrated into my heart. I condemned myself for having delayed so long to have recourse to prayer. I spurned the plan which I had formed of coldness and insensibility; but what I dreaded, was love, and weakness, which sometimes prompted a desire of going to see Leonce, of justifying myself in his eyes, and braving, in order to speak to him, all the duties of our sex, and every sentiment of delicacy. Against these dishonourable resolutions, I found ampler resources in the elevation of my mind towards God, in the promises which I made to him to continue faithful to the dictates of morality, and I returned to my house more fully satisfied with my own resolutions.

Some time after, I entered into conversation with Theresa, whom I had not seen for several days. She passes almost all her time in the company only of a venerable Priest, who has acquired an influence over her: her design is to go to Bourdeaux to arrange her affairs, as soon as she finds she has nothing to dread from her husband's family. While we were conversing together, I received letters from M. de Serbellane which my banker sent me, as it is under my name, he corresponds with Theresa; I delivered them to her. She wept bitterly on reading them, and said to me, "I am permitted to receive letters for a time, but in a few months I shall be no longer able to receive them."—I was desirous that she would explain herself more explicitly; but she refused, and I did not venture to insist on her granting my request. I am ignorant by what practices, or by what penances, she endeavours to console herself; without participating her opinions, I never made any attempt to refute them; but who knows, Louisa, whether there be not some species of misfortune for which every remedy of reason is insufficient?

## LETTER XLIV

DELPHINE TO MADemoisELLE D'ALBEMAR.

I THOUGHT myself much better, my dear sister, the last time I wrote to you; but to day some of the simplest circumstances, such indeed as naturally occur every day, have filled my heart with sorrow and vexation. The sad and gloomy foundation on which my destiny reposes cannot be altered, and yet my grief renews itself in a thousand forms, and each of them requires a new struggle to defeat it. Oh! who can possibly support existence for any length of time, at such a price as this?

This morning one of my servants brought me from Paris some letters of little importance, and a list of those persons who called at my house during my absence.—I looked over these details of society, which interest me now so little, with listless inattention, when a printed letter, which I had not noticed, attracted my attention. I opened it, and saw these words: "M. Leonce de Mondeville has the honour to inform you of his marriage with Mademoiselle de Vernon." The senseless insult of this vain formality is obvious enough, but does not folly predominate in every sentiment of the unhappy: I was in a rage with Leonce: I thought it was not altogether decorous to attend to the punctilios of the world towards a person in my situation. I considered this message at my door in the light of an insult, as if he had forgotten that he addressed a sentence of death to me, in the form of a circular note, without condescending to employ a single word of condolence or compassion on a subject which he must have known would afflict me. I passed the entire morning in a state of inexpressible irritation. Would you believe it? I began twenty letters to Leonce, and gave full scope to the expression of the misery that oppressed me; but I knew well, I assure you, that I should burn them all; of this I was confident; for, though I cannot be responsible for the passions which agitate me, yet, when actions from the subject, of deliberation, then you may rely with confidence, on my prudence and resolution.

This day, so unhappily begun, had still in reserve for me some farther impressions peculiarly distressing. Madame de Vernon came to dine with me; half an hour after her arrival, as I was leaning at my window, I beheld, in my avenue, the blue chariot of Leonce, which I knew so well. A frightful

tremor seized on me. I imagined he was coming with his wife to complete his barbarous ceremonial. I remained in a state of inexpressible agitation; I looked at Madame de Vernon, and the paleness of my countenance alarmed her so much, that she advanced towards me to prevent me from sinking to the ground. She then perceived the blue chariot which I fixed my eyes upon, without the power of turning them from the object. "It is only my daughter," said she instantly; "he will not be here, I am well assured he would not think of coming to your house." These words produced very different effects upon me, but I recovered breath when I found he was not coming. The expectation of so affecting a circumstance inspired me with an insupportable terror; but I was overspread with blushes, when I repeated to myself the words of Madame de Vernon—*he would not think of coming to your house*. She is convinced then, that he thinks me unworthy of his presence, or perhaps that he has compassion for my weakness, and the love which he imagines I still feel for him. Alas! were I but to see him, how calm, how proud and disdainful I should be!

While I was endeavouring to recover my spirits, the folding-doors of my drawing-room were displayed, and Madame de Mondeville was announced.

Louisa, this was to have been the name of the once happy Delphine, had not Theresa—alas! it was not Theresa; it was he himself alone who has betrayed me.—Under cover of this name, once so sweet and so harmonious, when it announced his presence, under cover of this name, Matilda advanced with dignity and confidence; while I, whom she has robbed of that title, dared not lift my eyes towards her, and could scarcely support myself. Her address was plain and simple, and she seemed to have no suspicion of the real motives of my absence, which she attributed to my concern for Madame d'Ervin's; and she appeared to me to have improved considerably by the conversation of Leonce. *I am not the rose, says an oriental Poet, but I have dwelt with it*. Just heavens! what is to become of me, condemned as I am to behold him no more!

In the course of our conversation, if Matilda seemed to employ a gesture, or an expression familiar to Leonce, the circulation of my blood was stopped, at a recollection so agreeable of itself, but so offensive to me when Matilda was the cause. One of Leonce's servants waited at table, and these minute circumstances of private life made me sick at heart. If I continue to live here, I must be exposed every moment to some fresh mortification; I must be compelled to see Matilda without ceasing, to be an hourly witness of her happiness, to see her drink the cup of joy drop by drop—No,

it is impossible, I cannot bear it.—When I was obliged to address myself to her, and offer her what was on the table, I avoided calling her by name; Madame de Vernon frequently addressed her as Madame de Mondeville, and every time I started at the sound. I perceived, without difficulty, that Madame de Vernon was offended with her daughter, but I avoided every topic that might introduce an animated conversation. I could scarcely articulate the most trifling words without betraying my confusion. After dinner, Madame de Vernon inquired of Matilda, when her new apartment was to be ready. “In six days,” replied Matilda; and then turning herself towards me, she said: “I see plainly that this new arrangement is displeasing to my mother, but I submit the matter to your judgment, cousin, whether it is not proper that we should live separate? Our taste and sentiments are extremely different: my mother loves play, she passes a part of the night in the midst of company, and I love solitude and retirement; we should both be much happier, in my opinion, if we continued to see one another as usual, but without living under the same roof.”—“Let us drop this subject,” said Madame de Vernon to her rather hastily; “I was willing to modify my habits of life. I should even have sacrificed them without reluctance, if I thought myself necessary to your happiness. With respect to your opinions, as it is I who superintended your education, I should certainly feel no difficulty in complying with a turn of thinking which it was my own desire you should adopt. You speak to me of nothing but taste, and habits; you never mention a word about affection or attachment. Whatever degree of regard you have for me, it is plain it has little influence over your plans of living. Well, let us say no more on this subject; I had only one illusion left, and you have convinced me that one alone is sufficient to embitter my life, however barren it may be in other respects.

Matilda reddened at this observation: I pressed the hand of Madame de Vernon, and we all three remained in silence for some minutes; which Madame de Vernon broke at last, by asking Matilda, if she had gone to see her cousin Madame de Lebenzei. “I did not imagine,” replied Matilda, “that you would require of me to go to see a woman who has married a second husband while her first was living: so scandalous a circumstance shall never be authorized by my presence.”—“But, observed Madame de Vernon, “her first husband was a foreigner, and a protestant, and she has been divorced from him, according to the laws of his country.”—“And as to his religion,” said Matilda, “do you consider that as nothing? She is a Catholic—could she think herself at liberty to act against the precepts of her religion?”—“You must know,” said Madame de Vernon, “that her first husband was a very contemptible



man; that she has loved the second for six years; and that he has rendered her the most generous services."—"I did not expect, I confess," interrupted Matilda, "that my mother would justify the conduct of Madame de Lebensei."—"I do not know if I justify it," replied Madame de Vernon; "but admitting that Madame de Lebensei had committed a fault, yet Christian charity enjoins indulgence towards her."—"Christian charity," said Matilda, "is always accessible to repentance; but when the guilty persist in their crimes, charity prescribes that we should at least remove from their contagion."—"And do you really wish, Matilda, that Madame de Lebensei should quit her husband?"—"Yes, undoubtedly," cried Matilda, "for M. de Lebensei is not and cannot be her husband? They say, moreover, that he is a person whose political and religious opinions are of an evil tendency; but I do not meddle with these matters—he is a protestant, and, as such, I am persuaded that he must be a man of loose morals. This is not the case with Madame de Lebensei; she is a Catholic; she is my relation: I must repeat to you that my conscience will not allow me to visit her."—"Well, then, I must go to see her alone," replied Madame de Vernon.—"I will attend you thither, my dear aunt," said I, "if you are willing to permit me."—"Amiable Delphine!" said Madame de Vernon, with a sigh, "we shall then go together: she lives at two leagues' distance from your house, in retirement and solitude: and being sensible how much her conduct has been not only criticised, but calumniated, she does not wish to expose herself again to the society of the world, which ill accords with her happiness."—"Have the goodness to tell her," said Matilda with some vivacity, "that it is not on account of the busy loquacity of the world, that I am hindered from visiting her. I am no slave to opinion, and no one would encounter it with more alacrity than myself, if the minutest of my duties were interested on the occasion. On the first symptom of repentance, which I shall discover in Madame de Lebensei, I shall fly to see her, and serve her with all my power."—"Matilda," said I unguardedly, "do you think that people repent of having married the object of their affections?"—Scarcely had these words escaped from me, when I dreaded to have drawn her attention to the sentiment which dictated them. But in this I was mistaken, for she made no discovery from my expressions; but only thought the sentiment had an immoral tendency, and as such she combated it with warmth. I continued silent; she returned to Paris with her mother, and I was happy to find a termination of my constraint and uneasiness. But, alas! what bitter sentiments revive in my heart! How unreasonable is the conduct of Leonce! He sends me no word of comfort; he wishes not to see

me; in fine, he overwhelms me with scorn and contempt!—Louisa, I have written the word, and, much as it has cost me, I have been able to write it; for it is with all the haughty disdain of my soul, that I view the injustice even of Leonce. Notwithstanding, I wish, even at the price of my miserable existence, I wish that it was possible for me to meet him once more by chance, without giving him reason to suspect that I sought for an interview. I should then be able (do not doubt it) to recover his esteem, and win him back again. I am proud of this idea—I love him still, perhaps—but what is above all requisite for me is, that he should restore me that consideration for which he has sacrificed his happiness; I say his happiness, for certainly I was more worthy of his ambition than Matilda. Is it impossible that some moment of remorse and sorrow may inspire him with a wish to speak to me once more? I beseech you, Louisa, do not hastily condemn the object of your early cares: the wish that I breathe, Heaven is my witness, is not formed with a view to deliver myself over to the most criminal sentiments. My desire is only to have it in my power to refuse to see him, and that he may know my determination to be irrevocable on that subject. I wish him to be punished by my resolution, and he will then cease to consider me as the weakest of all beings, and the most unworthy of his inflexibility of character. I am a prey, my dear Louisa, to the most poignant sorrows, not only those which I communicate in friendship to you, but others which I cannot easily describe. Pardon me, if I sink under the weight of misery; it is for your sake alone, that I am still alive.

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## LETTER XLV.

DELPHINE TO MADÉMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, August 8.

AM I, then, doomed not to take a single step which does not cruelly renew the scenes of sorrow with which I am encompassed? For what purpose was I brought to see Madame de Lebensei yesterday? She is happy in her marriage; and she is so, because her husband has had the spirit to bid defiance to opinion; because he has set at naught the silly slanders of the world; and is, in this respect, the very reverse of Leonce. Madame de Lebensei is happy; and I had reason to be more so, as her character is not entirely out of the reach of malign-

nant observation. Her heart is not disposed to love with equal warmth with mine: for who could inspire any woman with a passion so tender as that which I feel for Leonce? Madame de Vernon took me yesterday on a visit to Cernay, according to our previous agreement. Upon our arrival at that place, we found that M. de Lebensei was not at home. We perceived that Madame de Lebensei was affected at our interview: she endeavoured to conceal her emotion from us; but it was easy to discern, that a visit from her relations was an extraordinary event with her, in the social proscription in which she lived.

You were acquainted with Madame de Lebensei at Montpellier: she is about thirty; her countenance is serene and regular, and the expression of her features invariably the same. We conversed some time on those indifferent topics, the routine of worldly intercourse, invented for the purpose of cloaking the peculiarities of our characters and sentiments; but this species of conversation was totally uninteresting to a person like Madame de Lebensei, who was excluded from the busy scene of life. However, she dreaded introducing any subject of discourse which might induce us to discover our sentiments on her own peculiar situation. I ventured to name some persons of her own acquaintance to her. It appeared, as far as I could discover from her answers, that she was not in the habit of seeing them; but I could perceive that she felt their dereliction of her; and even this I could collect only from the disdain with which she spurned every thing that appeared like an attempt to justify her conduct, or that bore any resemblance to an effort to engage herself again in the intercourse of the world. "She is desirous of breaking every link that might connect her with society; but this is not the effect of indifference—it arises from a wish of preserving herself from the disagreeable sensations which a contrary conduct would expose her to. Madame de Lebensei has acquired such a habit of constraint in company, that it was a difficult point with us to induce her to converse with freedom and confidence. However, when Madame de Vernon made some polite apology to her, for the absence of her daughter, these words escaped from her:"—"You have the goodness, my dear madam, to conceal from me the real cause of this absence; which is that Madame de Mondeville is unwilling to see me, because I have married M. de Lebensei." Madame de Vernon smiled at this observation: I blushed, and Madame de Lebensei continued—"You, madam," said she, addressing herself to Madame de Vernon, "who have known me from my infancy, and who have been always in friendship with my family—it is you I have every reason to thank, for visiting me under these peculiar circumstances: to Madame d'Albe-

mar I am likewise indebted, for the favour she has done me, in accompanying you on this occasion. I can assure you, that I do not seek for the intercourse of the world: I wish to put it out of the power of the world to disturb my internal happiness; but still I set a high value on such a mark of kindness, and I feel as it becomes me to do." Her eyes overflowed with tears when she had done speaking: she rose to conceal them from us, and conducted us to see her garden, and the different parts of her house.

Every thing in the house and garden was arranged with care, taste, and simplicity. It was an establishment for life, and nothing useful was neglected. Every object called to mind the time already passed in this abode, and the still longer period which they destined for their future habitation in it. Madame de Lebensei appeared to me to possess a calm imagination, without any brilliancy; and a correct and enlightened understanding, without any elevation of sentiment. I could not well conceive how, with a character of this description, her conduct should have been that of a person of vivid feelings and passions; and I was very desirous of being acquainted with the causes of this apparent contradiction. But Madame de Vernon did not concur with me to gratify my curiosity, and avoided troubling her on such a subject. She appeared buried in melancholy and absence of mind, and took no part in the conversation.

As we passed over Madame de Lebensei's garden, I discovered, in a retired grove, an altar raised on a bank of turf, with this inscription: "To six years of happiness; Eliza and Henry." Lower down were these words: Love and courage will always unite the hearts of those who love." These words made a deep impression on me: I fancied that they formed a mournful contrast with my own destiny, and I remained absorbed in melancholy reflections, before this monument of happiness. Madame de Lebensei approached me, and I felt an irresistible impulse in the agitation of my spirits, to inquire into her history. "Alas!" cried I involuntarily, "will you not let me know how you attained this happiness? I imagined, before now, that there was not a single happy person on earth." Madame de Lebensei seemed affected with my sensibility, and spoke to me, with an expression of the most amiable tenderness: "You shall know, madam," said she, "since it is your desire, every thing that concerns my destiny: I cannot be insensible to the wish of endeavouring to merit your esteem. A sentiment of timidity, which you will allow to be natural, would make it painful to me, to speak for a long time about myself; but I shall have more confidence in writing, and I shall communicate my sufferings to you, by letter." Madame de Vernon rejoined us soon after, and was witness to my expression of gratitude.

Madame de Lebensei requested us both to stop a few days at her house: I refused, at least for that time, as I had not previously acquainted Theresa with this circumstance. We promised, however, to return to her again, and I in particular was desirous of seeing Madame de Lebensei a second time, and I should not wish to hurt her by a refusal. Persons in her situation are much liable to susceptibility, a susceptibility which tender minds should be tenacious of respecting, for even the most trifling circumstances have a mighty influence on the happiness of persons of such delicate sentiments and sensations.

On returning with Madame de Vernon, I was struck, then, more than in the morning, with her paleness and dejection; and I asked her, at what hour she had retired to rest the night before.—“At five o'clock in the morning,” replied she.—“You have then been engaged at play?”—“Yes.”—“Oh!” cried I, “how came you to abandon yourself to this fatal inclination? I thought you had renounced it a long time ago?”—“I am weary of the common formalities of life,” replied she, “I feel a want of interest, of emotion, and I find no pleasure in a state of repose. Play animates me, without any disagreeable sensation; it abstracts me from every other idea: and in this manner, my time glides insensibly away, which otherwise would hang heavy on my hands.”—“Is it becoming in you,” said I, “to hold such language—you, who have so good an understanding?”—“As for understanding,” interrupted she, “I do not pretend to much; you know I have only a talent for talking, and none for reading or reflection. I have been educated in this manner, and it is a fixed habit: when I am in company, I can think; when in solitude, I become fatigued and disgusted.”—“But do you find no pleasure,” said I, “in the sentiments which you inspire?”—“You have observed,” said she, “the conduct of my daughter towards me; of a daughter for whom I have made so many sacrifices. I am afraid, that in being desirous to serve her, I have become less worthy of your friendship: you still allow me a share in your esteem, but your confidence in me is not the same as before: every thing is altered for the worst with me; nevertheless, the moments that I pass with you, are by far the most agreeable of any; so let us not converse on the subject of my grievances, at the very instant in which I forget them.”—She then turned the conversation on Madame de Lebensei; and as her manners are at once graceful and dignified, it is impossible to persist in speaking to her on any subject she does avoid, and equally impossible to resist the charm of the sentiments which she does express.

She made herself so perfectly agreeable on the road, that I felt a momentary suspension from the anguish of my sorrows. The vivacity of her imagination, the delicacy of her expres-

sions, an air of softness and of negligence, which obtains every thing, and asks nothing; the talent of placing her soul so much in harmony with yours, that you imagine that you think with her, and at the same moment of time, every thing which her mind develops in yours; these advantages, which belong to her alone, can never totally relinquish their influence. When I am in company with Madame de Vernon, it seems impossible for me to avoid confiding in her friendship; yet, when I am far from her, my doubts revive, and repossess my mind. How capricious is the human heart! We entertain sentiments which we endeavour to justify to ourselves, because we feel a secret instigation to condemn them; and we yield to some peculiar graces, to minds of a certain description, with a species of timidity, which adds, perhaps, still more to their seductive influence, a charm which we ineffectually endeavour to resist.

This morning, when I rose, after having passed the night almost entirely in reflecting on the happy and quiet asylum of Cernay, I received the letter which Madame de Lebensei had promised to write to me. I now present you with this letter. You may judge, my dear Louisa, what must have been my feelings during my perusal of it.

*Madame de Lebensei to Madame d'Albemar.*

“Among the number of sacrifices which I am bound to make, the only one, my dear madam, which I should find it difficult to support, would be to have had the pleasure of knowing you, without making any attempt to prove to you, that I do not deserve the injustice, of which my enemies wished to make me the victim. Attach some value to my efforts to merit your approbation; for, until this day, I have been satisfied with my felicity, and proud in the object of my choice, and have never taken any steps to give an explanation of my conduct to any person whatsoever.

“When I formed the resolution of obtaining a divorce from my former husband, and some years after of marrying M. de Lebensei, I was perfectly sensible that I was ruining myself in the opinion of the world; and from that instant, I made a resolution never to appear in it again. The greatest punishment of which I can form an idea, is, in my opinion, that of struggling, in the midst of society, against the received opinions and prejudices of the world. To encounter a difficulty of this description, a great share of audacity, or even of humility, is requisite. I own that I possessed neither of these qualities in a sufficient degree, and I was not long in discovering, that a woman who does not yield to general prejudices, ought to live in retirement, if she wishes to preserve

her ease and dignity. But there is a vast difference between what is bad in itself, and what is bad only in the opinion of others; and with this consideration it will appear, that solitude sharpens the remorse of an evil conscience, while it consoles the innocent under the injustice of mankind. Had I been very agreeable, or very remarkable for grace and worldly accomplishments, the sacrifice of my expectations would have been painful in the extreme; but I was only an ordinary woman in conversation, though my manner of thinking was distinguished by strong sense and profound observation. I might, therefore, renounce the world, without dreading the continual regrets of vanity, which sooner or later disturb the tenderest affections.

“I had nothing to dread, moreover, from the ruscitation of exalted passion. I possess some reason, although my conduct has not been in exact conformity with what is commonly called so. It was not till after calm and deep reflection, that I came to a resolution so contradictory to all common rules; and as I formed my plan from a due consideration of my Henry’s character, and my own, none of these motives which decided me can cease to have influence on my conduct.

“The events of my life are very simple, and very little diversified; the series of my impressions forms the only interest in my history.

“A Hollander, M. de T. had brought a very ample fortune from the colonies, and came to pass some time at Montpellier, for the re-establishment of his health. He soon conceived, I knew not why, a violent passion for me, demanded me in marriage; and having obtained his wish, carried me into his own country, where I was a perfect stranger to every body. At the age of eighteen, I was compelled to break through all the tender ties of life. I was desirous of fixing my affections on my husband; but there was a constant jarring in our minds and tempers, which prevented the gradual growth of sympathy. He loved me, because he thought me handsome, for, in any other respect, he might be said to hate me. This species of affection which he felt for me, necessarily added to my uneasiness; for had not my features been agreeable to him, he would have kept himself at a distance from me, and not have incommoded me every moment in the day by faults, which rendered him totally insupportable. Avarice, cruelty, obstinacy, and every narrowness of mind and soul, were conspicuous in his character. I was engaged in a constant conflict with these odious qualities, and every day was meditating some new plan of happiness, which were all shipwrecked against his active and wayward mediocrity. He had acquired his fortune in America, by exercising a despotic power over his unhappy slaves. There he had contracted a habit of consider-

ing himself superior to every body around him;—noble sentiments, elevated ideas, appeared to him only affectation or idiotism; and, if any instance of generous virtue occurred within the circle of his knowledge, he made it a subject of ridicule. If you opposed his desires, he was not only inflamed with anger against you, but also imputed the worst of motives. It was his opinion, that there should be but one consideration in the world, to which every thing else should give way, that is, the art of growing rich, and the talent of promoting one's own interest in all cases whatever. He served to convince me of a truth, the force of which I have doubly felt, both during the period of my misery, and the happy years which followed it—that enlarged information, and the character and turn of thought which are styled philosophical, are as necessary to preserve the charms, the independence, and the satisfaction of private life, as they are to the splendour of any other sphere or rank in society. In order to live in peace with M. de T., it was necessary for me to renounce every sentiment of goodness, of which I thought myself possessed; there was no other method of keeping on good terms with him, but by concurring in his odious opinions.

“Although he never endeavoured to please, he was very uneasy about the opinion the world formed of him. He had neither that indifference for the judgment of mankind, which philosophy inspires, nor that respect for general esteem which his anxiety for obtaining it might naturally have prompted. He wished to acquire what he had determined not to merit; and this sort of conduct gave him an air of duplicity, in his transactions with strangers, and a giddy violence in his domestic department.

“His mind was employed, from morning to night, on the thoughts of enlarging his fortune; and I had not even the satisfaction of considering an augmentation of fortune in the light of a new source of enjoyment for myself, being perfectly assured that any accession to his wealth would immediately suggest to him the idea of a diminution of expense. I carefully avoided disputing with him on this subject, from a dread of prolonging our conversation, and of giving too free a scope to our real sentiments on each other, in the heat of argument.

“The exercise of any one virtue was no longer in my power; my time was totally engrossed by the cruel harshness, or by the indolence of my husband. At times, the sentiments of religion came to my relief: yet how little influence do they exert over me, since the commencement of my present happiness! Unvaried and continual sufferings, a lasting connexion with a person unworthy of one's attachment, spoil the temper, instead of improving it. The soul which has never expc-



rienced happiness, cannot ever be perfectly sweet and benevolent; and I still preserve some severity in my character. I am indebted for it to the years of misery which I have passed. Yes—it is a sentiment which I do not dread to express; if there was ever a circumstance which would justify a complaint against our Creator, it is from the bosom of an ill-suited marriage that this complaint would escape; it is on the threshold of the house inhabited by those ill-fated pairs we should engrave the beautiful expressions of Danté, which preclude every farther idea of hope. No—God has never condemned us to endure so great a misery! Vice submits to it in appearance only, and transcends its limits every day: virtue ought to dissolve the union, when she becomes incapable of renouncing the bliss of mutual love, a blessing, the sacrifice of which is more repugnant to our nature, than even the contempt of death.

“I shall not, on this occasion, madam, submit to you my opinion on the subject of divorce. When M. de Lebensei will have the happiness of knowing you, he will explain to you, better than any other person, the arguments which convinced me: I desire only to describe to you those sentiments and affections which have decided my destiny.

“One day, being at the French Ambassador’s house, at the Hague, it was announced to me, that a young Frenchman had arrived that morning from Paris, and that he was to be presented to us in the evening. A lady told me, that this Frenchman passed for an unpolished being, a man of learning, a philosopher, and I know not what; every thing that so few Frenchmen are at the age of five and twenty. She added, likewise, that he had finished his studies at Cambridge, and that, of course, he was spoiled by English manners: but as, in my opinion, there is not in existence a nobler character than the English, I did not perceive myself prejudiced against a man who resembled that people. I inquired his name, and she told me that it was Henry de Lebensei, a Protestant gentleman of Languedoc. His family was allied to mine: I had never seen him, but he knew the abode of my infancy; he was a Frenchman; he had at least heard of my relations, and this idea made a deep impression on me, considering the distance and absence of every thing which I considered dear.

“M. de Lebensei arrived at the Ambassador’s with many other young men, and I immediately recognised the picture which had been drawn to me. He had the dress and the exterior of an Englishman; there was nothing remarkable in his looks, except the elegance and dignity of a most expressive countenance. I was not struck with his first appearance; but the more I conversed with him, the more I admired the extent and force of his understanding, and the more I was con-

vinced that no other character was better adapted to my own.

"From that day to the present, after a period of six years, so far from reproaching myself for loving Henry de Lebensei, I have been constantly of opinion, that if I separated from him, I should reject the special favour of Providence, and the most evident sign of its protection, in giving me a friend, who restored me to the use of my natural qualities, and conducts me in the path of good morals, of order, and of happiness.

"You are no stranger, perhaps; to the cruel treatment that I experienced from M. de T. when he discovered my passion for M. de Lebensei. I had no children; and I demanded a divorce, according to the laws of Holland. M. de T. before he would consent to it, was for insisting on my absolute renunciation of all my fortune; and when I rejected this condition, he confined me at his country-seat, and threatened me with death. His love was now changed into hatred, and his whole conduct was in subjection to his domineering passion, covetousness. Henry rescued me by his courage, exposed his life a thousand times for my deliverance, and conveyed me at last, after two years' trouble, into France; during which time he rendered me every service which love and generosity could inspire.

"My divorce was pronounced; I shall not weary you by a recital of the pains which it cost me to obtain it; it is Henry whom I wish to acquaint you with the circumstances that attended it; and all my destiny is concentrated in him. I shall perhaps astonish you, my youthful and charming Delphine, when I say, that it was not such a passion as is felt in the effervescence of youth, which determined me to choose Henry for the depository of my happiness. There is reason in the sentiments I feel for him; that reason which calculates the future as well as the present, and takes into consideration the qualities and defects which may form the foundation of a lasting connexion.

"Much is said of the follies which love gives rise to; but I find more true sensibility in the moderation of the heart than its caprices: this wisdom consists, however, in loving, in our youth, him only who shall be equally dear to us in every stage of life. What a sweet precept of morality and happiness! Indeed, good morality and happiness are inseparable, unless when the fictitious combinations of society intermingle their baleful poison in the cup of a natural and simple life.

"Henry de Lebensei is certainly a man the most remarkable for his good sense that it is possible to meet with: a serious and studious education has furnished him with a variety of knowledge on every philosophical subject; and a very vivid imagination inspires him with new ideas on every object of

his observation. He takes delight in conversing with me, more especially, because a sort of uncouth and distant reserve renders him generally silent in society. As his mind is active, and his temper serious, the more contracted the circle is, the greater fertility and vivacity he displays in conversation; and, when with me only, he is still more agreeable than he is in the midst of a mixed society.

“For me, he reserves the treasures of his thoughts, and his accomplishments, while the generality of men become animated in proportion to the number of their audience, and inflated with vanity; yet, in the intimacy of domestic life, they lose their powers of bestowing gratification. All who love solitude, or whose peculiar circumstances have induced them to resort to it, will tell you of what importance, in their habitual enjoyments, is the necessity of a communication of ideas, and a mutual display of sentiments. It is this taste for conversation which communicates an interest to that mode of life, in which tranquillity is purchased at the expense of variety: for, do not imagine that the eagerness which Henry discovers for my society, proceeds only from his love for me. My reason tells me, moreover, that we ought never to rely on the qualities which love bestows, or to imagine ourselves exempt from the faults which it corrects. What makes me perfectly secure of my happiness with Henry is, that I know his temper and disposition, such as they really are, independent of the passion which he feels for me, and that I am the only person in the world before whom he exhibits without disguise his virtues as well as his imperfections.

“Henry possesses a species of gaiety and good humour, which can only be relished in the most intimate familiarity of sentiments: it is not the grace of ornament, but the grace of originality, the unaffected ease of which considerably augments its charm. When intimacy is arrived at this point, that we find charms in the sports of an infant, in a pleasantry twenty times repeated, in the minutest circumstances, which nobody but the two most interested persons can easily form a conception of, a thousand secret ties are twisted round the heart, and a word, a sign, is sufficient, or the slightest allusion to any pleasing circumstance of former times, to recall to memory from the most distant quarters of the world every object of affection.

“I am little disposed to jealousy, but Henry has never given me the slightest reason to feel that fatal passion. I am sensible that I am the only person that knows him, and understands his sentiments, and that he enjoys the satisfaction of being known, and esteemed by me, without the necessity of any formal expression of attachment. He is a man of the most independent opinions, and feels a considerable contempt

for men in general, though very benevolent to each of them in particular. He has been much exposed to detraction, especially since, in political disputes, he has shown himself an advocate for the revolution. He pleads guilty to the charge, and nothing in the world could persuade him to a justification, or even a demonstration of his real sentiments.

“As soon as this demonstration may come to be demanded of him, it becomes impossible to him on such a supposition. The natural turn of his temper is to me a farther guarantee of his fidelity; for if he should form a new connexion, he would be obliged to enter into explanations of himself on his imperfections, on his good qualities; which explanations are totally unnecessary in his intercourse with me. He has always spoken to me by his actions, and it is in such a manner, that a proud, and a calumniated character desires to make itself understood.

Under the coldness, and even austerity, of his outward deportment, he is more accessible to compassion than any other man; but this secret he conceals, through dread of its being abused: yet, it is well known to me, and I rely upon it. I should really be very unhappy, if his only inducement to seek my company arose from a dread of afflicting me by his absence: but I am convinced of the contrary; and, in the perfect enjoyment of his love, I indulge the pleasing reflection that two of his virtues give me full security for his heart, which are, his invariable truth, and the sweetness of his temper. We are too apt to delude ourselves; but it is obvious, to every observer of society, that men stand in very little need of the company of the female sex. Such a diversity of interests animates their views, that for the durability of an attachment, the most ardent passion, and the most winning attractions, are not a sufficient security. Principles and qualities of an invariable nature are essentially requisite to preserve the mind from any new impressions, to arrest the caprices of imagination, and fortify the heart before the combat; for, if the struggle takes place, the triumph itself would be no longer the triumph of affection.

“What good qualities, however, what singularities also, must not be united in the character of a man, to have a complete certainty of his invariable and devoted affection! Without this certainty, how rash would be the step which I have taken! For, when a resolution is adopted in opposition to public opinion, there is nothing to support us but ourselves alone. You have formed an engagement to be happy; and, if ever an expression of regret escape your lips, your friends and the public will be ready to repulse these stragglers from your heart, and force them thither to take refuge in the only asylum which remains.

“I must not dissemble the political opinions of Henry, the

energy of his character, his absolute indifference for the sentiments of others, when in opposition to his own. All these circumstances have proved able auxiliaries to me in my struggle against the dislike of the world. A man, without difficulty, overleaps every obstacle except that of his own conscience; and, if he possesses distinguished talents, it is in the pursuit of glory he seeks to captivate the public esteem: for glory commences at a vast distance from the fleeting circle of our temporary relations, and reaches them only after a length of time. Monsieur de Lebensei, by a singular but a natural contrast, is perfectly indifferent to the opinion of what is termed society, but very ambitious to acquire hereafter the approbation of the enlightened world. As for myself, who can only be known in my own small circle, I do not deny, that I am sometimes afflicted with the general censure which is attached to my conduct; but, as this censure makes not the slightest impression on Henry, as I am assured he is perfectly indifferent about it, I can easily get rid of my own uneasiness. In a just and reasonable sympathy, a proper regard for the object of our affections, makes us inconsolable for their distress. We are always most ready to forget our own share of the misfortune.

“I was persuaded, that the principles of morality and religion, properly understood, did not forbid me to marry Henry, since, by this resolution, I injured the happiness of no person whatsoever, and it was to God alone I was bound to give an account of my actions. Ought I, then, when Heaven had thrown in my way the only character that could identify with my own, the only man who could draw, from my qualifications and defects, the sources of felicity for us both—ought I to sacrifice this singular destiny, to the dread of evil speaking, on the part of my cold friends, who have so soon forgotten me; on the part of indifferent persons, who scarcely know my name? Their advice would be, for me to renounce the only being that loves me—the only person who protects me in the world, even while they prepare to refuse me relief in case of necessity; if, becoming insulated through deference to their advice, I should ask them for only one of the thousand services, which my Henry would perform for me without enumerating them.

“No;—it is not to the opinions of mankind—it is to virtue alone we must sacrifice the affections of the heart: between God and Love I know no other mediator than Conscience.

“What then is the threatened punishment of society? To see you no more? The punishment is not equal to the severity of the laws which it enacts.

“However, I repeat it to you, madam, you, who are still in the first years of youth, my examples ought not to prevail on

any person to imitate me. The hazard of braving the opinion of the world, is a very critical point for a woman: to attempt it, one must, in the language of the poet, have *triple brass around the heart*; must become insensible to the shafts of calumny, and concentrate within one's self all the warmth of one's sentiments. It is necessary to have the fortitude to renounce the world, to possess the resources which disdain its aid: not to be blessed, however, with either uncommon beauty, or understanding, which might give room for regret, on the loss of the flattering expectations attending on these qualities. Lastly, we must find, in the object of our sacrifices, the never-failing source of the diversified enjoyments of the heart, and of reason: we must walk through life, supported on each other, in loving mutually, and doing good.

"You are now, madam, acquainted with my situation: you must have perceived that my happiness is not without alloy; but perfect happiness can never be the lot of a woman whom the errors of her parents, or her own, have compelled to contract an unhappy marriage. If the child, which I carry in my womb, is to be a daughter, with what attention shall I not watch over her choice! How often shall I not repeat to her, that, with respect to women, all the years of their life depend on a single day! and that, on a single act of their will, depend all the enjoyments of their future destiny!

"When persons whom I esteem condemn the resolution which I have taken, when I am exposed to the weakness or hard-heartedness of my friends, I sometimes cannot find in solitude the repose which I expected; and the recollection of the world invades my retreat, to disturb my peace of mind: but in the moment of my greatest dejection, the appearance of a fine day, with my Henry, relieves my soul. We are both of us still young, and nevertheless we often talk of death: we seek in our woods for some peaceable asylum to depose our ashes; where we shall be united, when succeeding generations, treading on our graves, shall no longer reproach us with our mutual affection.

"We often converse together on the subject of religion, and cast towards heaven our supplicating glances of affection. Our souls being strengthened by our intimacy, endeavour to penetrate together into the eternal mysteries.

"We exist by ourselves, without any support, without any succour from mankind. M. de Lebensei, I hope, is much happier than I am, for he is much more independent of external assistance. When I smart under the uneasiness which I feel from public opinion, I say to myself, that I should have been too happy, if men had joined their suffrages to my internal happiness; if I had seen, as it were, my felicity repeated in a thousand ways, by their kind looks of approbation. The im-

perfection of our destiny intermixes some bitter drops with the purest of our pleasures; the pain that I feel—the only pain of my life, secures to me, perhaps, the possession of every thing I hold dear; it acquits me, with respect to grief, which is unwilling to be forgotten; and I shall obtain, perhaps, in compensation, the only blessing, which I now demand of heaven—to die before Henry, to witness his tender cares in my last hour, to hear his sweet voice, thanking me for having made him happy, for having preferred him to every person on earth;—then I shall have lived according to the true destiny for which women are created, to love, and still to love, and at last to restore to God, who has bestowed it on us, a soul which has been solely occupied by tender sentiments and affections.

ELIZA DE LEBENSEI."

Ah! my dear Louisa, after the perusal of this letter, did you not shed some tears for the sorrow which it has revived in my bosom? Have you anticipated all the bitter reflections which it has suggested to me? How many obstacles has not M. de Lebensei surmounted, in order to marry the woman whom he loved! and with what indifference has not Leonce renounced me! It is only Madame de Lebensei who is concerned at the opinion of the world, for her husband bestows not a single thought upon it; he depends upon his own affections, and submits to love alone: and Leonce—do not think, however, that his character possesses less energy, that he is inferior, in any respect, to any man; but it is love alone he was deficient in. I wish to deceive myself by vain illusions, but, in reality, the evil lies totally in that direction.

Alas! Madame de Lebensei, without reflecting upon it, condemns in every line the conduct of Leonce! The grief which I have experienced from the perusal of this letter, will not be totally useless to me; if I ever see him again, I shall be able to address him, I shall be calm and dignified in his presence.

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## LETTER XLVI.

DELPHINE TO MADemoisELLE D'ALBEMAR.

ALAS! Louisa, what have I experienced? What has he said to me? I recollect not a word. I have seen him—my soul is in confusion; I enjoyed a glimpse of hope, and Madam de Vernon has almost totally snatched it from my possession.

Perhaps, you may be able to throw some light on my condition. Alas! I am incapable of judging of any circumstance by myself alone.

I received yesterday at Paris, where I was to reconduct Madame de Vernon, a very affecting letter from Madame d'Ervin. In this letter, she conjured me to go to a painter's at the Louvre, where M. de Serbellane's portrait was still left, and to bring it to her, to view it for the last time. I was persuaded last night, says she, that his features were effaced from my memory; I looked for them, as it were, through mists placed between me and my recollection. I know well that it is a frantic chimera of my fancy, but I must endeavour to tranquillize my troubled mind, before the last sacrifice takes place. The indulgence which I still feel for my own weaknesses, shall not embarrass you much longer, my dear friend; for my resolution is fixed, and every object that appears to allure me from it, tends only to bring me nearer to my design.

I felt no reluctance in endeavouring to console Theresa, according to her own desire; and Madame de Vernon, to whom I communicated my sentiments about her, was entirely of my opinion.

I went therefore, this morning, to the Louvre; but, before I reached the residence of M. de Serbellane's painter, I stopped some time in the picture gallery. Among others, there was a painting exhibited, which had just come from the hands of a young artist, and such was the impression made on me by the first view of it, that I burst immediately into a flood of tears. Of all the fine arts, you know that painting produces the least effect on my imagination; but the impression left upon my mind, by the present picture, was of that lively and affecting nature, which I had hitherto experienced from poetry and music only.

The\* subject of this piece was, the return of Marcus Sextus to Rome, after the proscriptions of Sylla. On entering his house, he finds his wife stretched lifeless on her bed; and his young daughter, in the wildness of despair and grief, comes and throws herself at his feet. Marcus holds the pale and livid hand of his wife in his own; he hesitates to look in her face, through horror of the cruel expectation. His hair stands on end, he remains immovable, but all his members are contracted with despair. The agitation of his soul consigns his body to a state of torpid inaction. The lamp is extinguished, the tripod which supports it is overturned. Every circumstance in the picture brings death before the eyes of the spectator; grief alone is the only expression of life in it.

\*This painting has been exhibited for three years in the gallery.



While viewing this painting, I was affected with that profound pity, which fictions never raise in our hearts, unmixed with any consideration for ourselves; and I contemplated this scene of sorrow, with the same sensations I should have felt in the midst of a tempest, in viewing at a distance the floating fragments of a wreck.

I was extricated from my reverie by the arrival of a painter, who conducted me to his workshop. I saw M. de Serbellane's portrait, which was a most striking likeness. I desired it to be conveyed into my carriage; and while this was performing, I returned into the gallery to view once more the picture of Marcus Sextus.

On entering, I perceived Leonce before the picture, in the same situation that I had been myself, and appearing to be affected with its expressive representation. His presence deprived me, in an instant, of all power of reflection, and I advanced towards him without knowing what I was about. He lifted up his eyes towards me, without seeming to be surprised at my sudden appearance. His soul was agitated before my approach; and it seemed to me, that his thoughts were turned on me in the moment of my arrival, and that his reflections had already prepared him for my presence.

He addressed me with every appearance of disorder and distraction, and scarce deigned to turn his eyes on me: "This unhappy Roman," says he, "has been much pitied, who, on returning to his country, finds only the inanimate relics of the object of his tenderness. But how much more unhappy would he have been, had he been deceived by the woman that he adored, if he could no longer esteem her, nor even regret her loss without indignity to himself! When death has snatched away the woman that we love, death can unite us once more with her; our souls, in taking flight from our bosoms, seem to escape to the image of our adoration: but if the remembrance of her is accompanied with bitter recollections, if you cannot think of her without a mixture of love and indignation, if you suffer internally by a constant struggle of repugnant sentiments; what consolation will you find in the tomb? Alas! Madam, behold that unhappy man sinking under the load of his distresses; yet he has not experienced the most poignant of all afflictions: nature, inexhaustible in her resources, still spares him from the extremity of misery.—He holds," cried Leonce, with an accent of bitter severity, and seizing my arm like a frantic person, "he holds in his hand the livid arm of the partner of his life; but the cruel hand of her who was so dear to him, had never plunged a poisoned dagger in his breast."

Terrified with his emotion, and being unable to divine the meaning of his words, I was desirous to answer him, to interrogate him, and to justify myself. In this instant, one of my

servants was employed in carrying the portrait of M. de Serbellane; and the painter who followed him, ordered it to be placed, with all possible care, in Madame d'Albemar's carriage. Upon this, Leonce quitted me; and going to the portrait, lifts the cloth that covered it, throws it back with violence, and returning to me with the most insulting expression of countenance—"Pardon, Madam," said he, "the moments I have made you lose; I know not what was the cause of my emotion; but what is certain," added he, laying a stress on the word, with all the haughtiness of his soul, "what is certain, Madam, is, that I am perfectly at ease at present."—Having pronounced these words, he drew his hat over his eyes, and immediately disappeared.

I remained confounded with this scene, and immoveable on the spot where Leonce had left me. I endeavoured to discover the meaning of the cutting reproaches which he vented against me; and the idea presented itself, from every word he said, and from the impression made on him by M. de Serbellane's picture, that jealousy was the real cause of his resentment. This supposition, perhaps in itself agreeable to me, appeared in a confused light to me, when Madame de Vernon arrived. I did not expect her; she had been at my house, not supposing me to have gone out, and being desirous to bring me with her to the painter's. In my first emotion, I expressed to her every idea that disturbed me, and I asked her, with great eagerness, how Leonce could imagine that I was in love with M. de Serbellane, as he knew so well the history of Madame d'Ervin? Really, replied she, he imagines no such thing. But you have no idea of his character, and irritability in every circumstance that concerns you.—This answer was far from satisfying me, and I looked with astonishment on Madame de Vernon. I do not know what passed in her mind on that occasion; but she was silent for some time, and replied to me afterwards with a firmness of tone, which made me blush for the thoughts which I had entertained, and proved to me too satisfactorily, that they were without any just foundation.

"I now discover," said Madame de Vernon to me, "the cause of that unjust diffidence that you have in me, which I can endure no longer, and must request of you to come to an explanation on the subject. I shall constrain Leonce, notwithstanding the motives that might restrain me from such a step, to explain to you himself, the reasons which have decided him not to unite himself with you. This is a proceeding, perhaps, somewhat in opposition to my duty as a mother, to bring you into company with my daughter's husband; for I am certain he can never see you without considerable emotion, whatever may be his opinion of your conduct: but I cannot endure your want of confidence in me; and in order to remove it, I shall

write to-morrow to Leonce, to come to an interview with you."

Consider, my dear sister, the terror I felt at such a proposal. I conjured Madame de Vernon to relinquish it; she quitted me without acquainting me of her resolution, and I could perceive she felt herself hurt, nor could I draw a single word from her. I am now going to spend two days at Cernay, with Madame de Lebensei: if Madame Vernon, in spite of my remonstrances, has so little consideration for me, as to ask Leonce to see me, he shall know, at least, that I have not consented to such a humiliation, nor shall he find me at home, nor at Paris, nor Bellerive.

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## LETTER XLVII.

MADAME DE VERNON TO LEONCE.

AFTER all I have told you, after all that has passed, the agitation you discovered yesterday morning in speaking to Madame d'Albemar, has much astonished her, my dear Leonce. She wishes not to depart till you are on good terms with each other: she thinks, and with reason, that as you are become near relations by your marriage with my daughter, you ought not to continue in a state of mutual rancour. I wish, therefore, that you should both meet together at my house to-morrow evening. Is it your desire to come?

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## LETTER XLVIII.

LEONCE IN ANSWER TO THE PRECEDING.

I HAVE nothing to say to Madame d'Albemar, my dear madam, which can induce me to seek the interview which you demand. We are, now, and we shall continue to be, perfect strangers to each other. Friendship, like love, should be founded on esteem; and when I am forced to renounce it, I hope you will dispense with the trouble of a formal declaration.

## LETTER XLIX.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, August 14.

I HAVE offended her, mortally offended her, my dear friend; it was my wish to do so, and yet I repent it with bitterness. But how comes it to pass, that on the very day on which I learned by accident from Madame de Vernon, that Madame d'Albemar was to go to M. de Serbellane's painter, on that day when I saw her take away the picture, Madame de Vernon makes a proposal to me, to meet Madame d'Albemar at her house! She requests me to bid her farewell, on her departure, to rejoin M. de Serbellane! and in what terms does Madame de Vernon, inspired no doubt by Madame d'Albemar, endeavour to persuade me to this measure? She brings to my recollection the ties of friendship and of family connexions, which necessarily must bring me near her niece! No—I am neither the relation, nor the friend of Delphine; I hate her, or I adore her; there is no medium in this case, and nothing shall proceed according to common rules. I should not, certainly, have employed injurious expressions in my refusal to see her; so many circumstances, however, concurred at that time to irritate me against her, that I was not master of my discretion. For that day I was tolerably at my ease; but during the night, and the following day, I was not able to escape from the remorse which tormented me, for having cruelly insulted her, whom I have so tenderly loved. I went to Madame de Vernon's to conjure her not to show my answer to Madame d'Albemar. She had set off, they told me, about an hour before, for Madame de Lebensel's country house, and was still on the road. I had hopes of coming up with her, by getting on horseback, and I set out in an instant; I arrived at Cernay, without meeting Madame de Vernon; a servant went before me; the gate was opened—I entered, and the first object that struck my sight, was Madame d'Albemar's carriage, which was drawn up before the house door. I imagined that Madame d'Albemar was on the point of departing, and by an unaccountable contradiction of my heart, although I did not come with the intention of seeing her, yet I could not support the idea of the impossibility of such an event. Without design or reflection, I advanced, and called to the coachman to draw back.—He told me, that he expected Madame d'Albemar, and waited her orders.—“Draw back,” said I; and at the same time I sprung

to the ground with such fury, that he complied with my orders from fear. I was ashamed of my foolish passion, when I found myself in the middle of the yard, and exposed to the observations of all the servants who were present. Madame d'Albemar's servant, recollecting the time when his mistress took a pleasure in seeing me, told me she was in the garden. I entered by the nearest door, still continuing in the same state of absence and distraction: I was in a strange house, where I knew not a single person; yet I proceeded where she was, like a wretch dragged on by a supernatural power. It was nine o'clock at night, the heavens were perfectly serene and clear, and the beauty of the scene would have soothed any heart but mine; but such was my agitation, that I was incapable of any pleasing impression. I endeavoured to find her, and my eyes revolted at every other object. I perceived from an eminence in the garden, across the shade of the surrounding trees, that charming figure which I am doomed never to forget; she was reclining on a monument; which she seemed to examine with attention; at her feet was a little girl, dressed in black, who drew her by the gown, in order to fix her attention on herself. I approached without discovering myself. Delphine was raising her beautiful eyes to heaven, and I thought she appeared pale and trembling, such as I had before observed her at church: she was employed in prayer, and enthusiasm and inspiration were depicted on her countenance. The wind blew towards her, and ruffled the folds of her garment before it came to me. In breathing this air, I imagined that I was intoxicated with beholding her, and that the breeze wafted towards me a divine inspiration: I remained some moments in this situation; my oppressed heart had enjoyed no repose for a month past, and I then felt it beat with greater ease, and could have placed my hand on it without a painful sensation. I should have continued a long time in this state, had I not perceived Delphine going out of the arbour, in order to read by moonlight a letter which she held in her hand: it immediately occurred to me, that this was the letter which I had written to Madame de Vernon, and I conjectured, that the signs of sorrow which the features of Delphine exhibited, were occasioned by the uneasiness which I had given to her. I was unable to resist this idea: I went up precipitately to Madame d'Albemar; she turned round, and starting at the sight of me, she supported herself against a tree, being on the point of sinking to the ground. I recognised my letter, which she was still reading: I made a motion to snatch it from her hands, and tear it; when Delphine, recovering herself, advanced towards me, holding the letter in one hand, with the other lifted towards heaven.

I never beheld her so captivating as on this occasion, and

struck with admiration, I considered myself the only culpable person: I seemed to hear the angels whom she invoked, speaking in her defence, and accusing me alone. I threw myself on my knees, before Heaven and before Delphine—before her beauty; and being no longer master of myself, I know not what I adored. “Speak,” cried I, “speak, my Delphine: prostrate before you, I request you to justify yourself.”—“No,” said she, placing her hand on her heart, “my answer is here:—he who has been capable of insulting me, does not deserve to hear my defence.” She withdrew from me—I conjured her to stay, but to no purpose.

Madame de Vernon appeared at a distance, coming hastily to us, with Madame de Lebensei. I made my last effort to obtain a word; it proved ineffectual, and my offended heart recovered its indignation, which the sight of Delphine had for a while suspended. I wished to appear calm in the presence of strangers, and not to make Delphine the witness of my dejection: I spoke with haste and confusion, and brought together, at hazard, every thing that I could say to Madame de Lebensei and Madame de Vernon; and having thought that I had said enough to give myself an air of indifference and tranquillity, I then cast my eyes on Delphine, and viewed her at first with some assurance. She did not, like me, endeavour to hide her emotion; she was leaning on Madame d’Ervin’s daughter; she walked with great difficulty, made no reply to any thing, and only directed her eyes towards the road that led out of the park. Seeing her sorrow and dejection, I remained silent, and followed her steps without saying a word. Madame de Vernon and Madame de Lebensei, strove in vain to support the conversation—at the moment we approached the gate, Madame d’Albemar cast her eyes on me: if I had only felt this glance, I believe my situation would not be deplorable;—but she has refused to justify her conduct.—But senseless as I am! what defence could she have made? Will she disavow her choice? Has she not already deceived me, and can she do away the past? Why then have I wished to see her, and why cannot I forget the expression of grief which was painted in her countenance? Is this another instance of perfidious artifice, of artifice in those looks and accents? and did she counterfeit the state in which I beheld her, when she was unconscious of my presence?

On her departure, her carriage passed before one of the walks of the park, and I stepped behind the trees, to follow her still with my eyes. Madame d’Ervin’s daughter had thrown her arms around her, and Delphine kept her pressed to her bosom, in a position so tender, and with such an affecting expression! I thought I could see her bosom heave with sobs and sighs. Could an artful, dissembling woman, thus

press a child to her bosom? Could that bosom, at an age of truth and purity, be already associated with the artifices of falsehood? No.—She was affected by my presence! this sentiment I do not consider as a fiction of my imagination.—But she is attached to M. de Serbellane; she could not deny that to me; it was what I naturally expected, and therefore I shall follow her no more. Before this interview, I had hopes, that if I should see her again, that instant would decide my fate: I have seen her! and my destiny is consigned to greater misery. What business had I at Madame de Lebensei's? Why was Madame d'Albemar there? It is a house which is disagreeable to me in every respect, and M. de Lebensei was absent, a circumstance which I did not regret. Has not M. de Lebensei allured a woman that he loved, to a step which has exposed her to universal censure? That she is unhappy, I have no doubt, notwithstanding her repeated assertions, to the contrary: her secret uneasiness, her apparent ease, that mixture of timidity and pride, which makes her deportment so inconsistent; every circumstance, in fine, furnished undoubted proof, and there is no braving public opinion, without suffering the cruel consequences of such a step. But, as for me, who respect opinion, who have never done any thing which I can be reproached with, am I more happy on that account? I can assure you, my dear friend, that there is not on earth a man so miserable.

From what cause is it, that, while you are writing to me with confidence and affection, you are silent on the subject of my sorrows, as if you dreaded to let me know, that you still love Madame d'Albemar? I agree with you in that respect, I am, perhaps, weak enough to desire it to be so; but I pray you, speak to me about her, and do not abandon me alone to the torment of my thoughts.

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## LETTER L.

MADemoiselle D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, August 23.

FOR the first time in my life, my dear friend, I entirely disapprove of the sentiments which you express to me. What! Leonce, on refusing to see you, writes a formal letter to announce, that he has ceased to esteem you; and yet, in the

very moment when such provoking conduct should inspire you with the utmost indignation, your \*letter to me is filled with expressions of sorrow, for not having spoken to him, and for not attempting to justify yourself in his eyes! It may be said with reason of you, that you become weak, in proportion to his injustice: it is in vain to deceive yourself by assuring me, that it is not love, but pride, and the sentiment of wounded dignity, which will not suffer you to endure the thought that he should imagine himself entitled to shock your feelings by a public display of the bad opinion he entertains for you.

Do you desire to hear the truth? I must tell you, that Leonce's letter gives you more uneasiness than any other circumstance, and you have no longer the power to submit yourself to your lot. This is not all: by seeing this terrible Leonce again, your sentiments of attachment to him are revived; and, perhaps, (pardon the expression,) he is necessary to enable you to understand yourself, or you may have perceived that he felt a deep emotion in your presence, and that a longer conversation might place him at your feet. Pardon me once more, but let me suggest to you, that the impressions made on your heart, are not accurately known to yourself; but still reflect on the irreparable injury you will inflict, by exciting a passion in the breast of Leonce, which will inevitably inspire him with an aversion for Matilda.—

My dear Delphine do you remember the sentiment you repeated so often in your conversations with my brother; that goodness of heart was the source of every other virtue; and that a being who had never done an injury to any person, was exempt from every fault before the tribunal of conscience! I firmly believe with you, that the true revelation of natural morals, exists in the sympathy which we feel for the sufferings of others. And will you, my dear Delphine, bid defiance to this sentiment? I shall not reason with you concerning your duties: I shall only say:—Think of Matilda; she is only eighteen years of age, and she has confided her happiness and her life to Leonce. Will you abuse the charms which nature has bestowed on you, in order to ravish from her that heart which God and the laws of society have assigned her for her support? I know you wish it not: how many dangers encompass you in your present situation, if you have not the courage to quit Paris, and come to reside with me!

It gives me some uneasiness to reflect that this Madame de Vernon, whose conduct is so complicated, though her conversation is so simple, is the only person who has any influence over you at Paris. Why do you make no return to the zea-

\* This letter, and some others which are alluded to, are not to be found in this collection.



lous attachment of Madame d'Artenas to you, since you have done an essential service for her niece Madame de R. ? She has written several times to me to testify her desire of forming a closer intimacy with you : I know that when she came to see us at Montpellier, on her return from Barège, you would not permit me to compare her with Madame de Vernon. Undoubtedly she is less agreeable ; she does not possess that appearance of sensibility, that gentleness in conversation, and that air of reverie in her silence, which charm you so much in Madame de Vernon : but her character is much more natural ; she has a perfect knowledge of the world, and I confess that she sets too much value on it ; and if she had not really a great deal of sense, the importance which she assigns to every thing that is said at Paris, might pass with me for *mere gossiping*. However, nobody gives better advice ; and whether it be virtue or reason, she is invariably on the side of rectitude. Do not refuse to listen to her advice ; you will not speak to her, I am sensible, on the subjects which are better adapted to youthful years ; but in other respects, she will give you wholesome counsels, while Madame de Vernon, who only seeks to please you, has never your real interest at heart. I conjure you also, my dear Delphine, to conceal nothing from me that passes in your heart, or in the daily occurrences of your life : you evidently require support to enable you to keep up your noble resolution of departing. Believe me on this occasion, when I say, that, if passion did not perplex you, no being on the earth could be so presumptuous as to compare their reason with yours : but you love Leonce, and I love only you ; give yourself up then without reserve to my tenderness, and be guided entirely by it.

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## LETTER LI.

MADAME D'ARTENAS TO MADAME DE R\*\*\*.

Paris, September 1, 1790.

RETURN once more to Paris, my dear niece : you have shown too strong an inclination for solitude this year : since that unfortunate scene at the Thuilleries, you are melancholy : I am desirous that you should feel a little the necessity of following my counsels, but I should be sorry you should lose the gaiety so natural to your character.

I have, at last, found an opportunity of seeing Madame d'Albemar, whom you desired me to call on; and I should certainly have sought an acquaintance with her, on my own account, I found her so amiable and excellent. It was my wish that she should speak to me with confidence, on her actual situation; but Madame de Vernon has entire possession of her friendship, and I doubt whether she makes a good use of her influence. I found Madame d'Albemar overwhelmed with sorrow, and in a violent agitation: she had every appearance of a person labouring under a cruel indecision: it was nine o'clock at night: she was still in her morning dress—her beautiful hair in disorder; and by the neglect of personal decoration, by her slow step, and the dejection of her aspect, she gave every indication of being entirely occupied by the same thought, and of suffering from the same cause of grief.

In such a state, however, she was as beautiful as the day, and I could not help telling her so. "Me beautiful!" said she: "I must no longer consider myself to be so."

She remained silent for some time, and I was desirous of learning from her, how matters were at present with respect to her and M. de Serbellane. There is a variety of reports on the subject at Paris: some say, she goes to Languedoc for no other purpose than to rejoin M. de Serbellane, if he cannot obtain permission to return to France, on account of his duel. Others whisper, that Madame d'Albemar has been very coquettish to M. de Mondeville, and that M. de Serbellane was offended, and had quarrelled with her. To conclude, a letter from Bordeaux gave rise to a very different idea in my mind, which I have hitherto kept concealed from the world. I was of opinion, that M. de Serbellane was the lover of Madame d'Ervin, and that Madame d'Albemar having, rather indiscreetly, brought them together at her house, M. d'Ervin had surprised them there, and fought a duel with M. de Serbellane to avenge himself for the infidelity of his wife.

I attempted to engage the confidence of Madame d'Albemar, by telling her the truth; which was, that I saw with uneasiness that the different reports concerning her, that circulated in Paris, might be prejudicial to her reputation. She replied to me in such discouraging terms, that I felt myself considerably affected. "There was a period in my life," said she, "in which I should have attached some importance to what was said respecting me; but now that my name is not to be united with that of any other person, I give myself no uneasiness for the injustice that may be done to my reputation." These words convinced me, that she had really had some difference with M. de Serbellane; and as I began to give her some consolation on the anxiety which such an event must cause to her, she stopped me, to demand an explanation: when

I had explained my sentiments, she seemed rather surprised; but, without laying any stress on that circumstance, she declared to me, that she had never any intention of marrying M. de Serbellane.

The suspicion I entertained respecting Madame d'Ervin's immediately occurred to me, and I made it known to Delphine; declaring to her, that, in the present case, I looked upon Madame d'Ervin's as the real cause of her husband's death. Delphine no sooner heard me, than she recovered herself from the state of dejection, in which I had hitherto seen her, and protested to me, that I was mistaken. I persisted in my opinion, and I told her positively, that so desperate a duel could never have been occasioned by mere political discussions; and that M. de Serbellane's passion for her, or Madame d'Ervin's, must have been the true cause of it. When Madame d'Albemar saw that this idea was confirmed in my mind, she ceased to contradict any opinion that I formed respecting her attachment for M. de Serbellane, requesting only that I should not accuse Madame d'Ervin's.

What shall I say to you, my dear niece, on this subject? It was impossible for me to develop the truth. It is not, assuredly, that Madame d'Albemar is not the most frank and candid woman that I have ever known; but still, there is such a singular generosity in her disposition, that I have not been enabled to discover, with certainty, whether the whole mystery of the business does not rest on the fears which she entertains of committing Madame d'Ervin's. Does she really love M. de Serbellane? Does her sorrow proceed from their separation, or perhaps from their falling out? Or does she, in fact, give way to every thing which can be said of herself and him, to turn off the attention which might be directed towards Madame d'Ervin's, and to save her from the indignation which might be excited in the public, and in her husband's family? I am in the dark about this circumstance, and I request of you the most profound secrecy on this last supposition: you must be sensible of its consequences.

Whatever may be the case, Madame d'Albemar has rendered all my penetration useless; yet I glory in unmasking the characters of the dissembling; but when a frank and candid soul desires to conceal a secret, its simple and natural reserve eludes all the efforts of the most experienced and judicious minds.

After some moments of silence, I insisted no longer on these topics; and, confining myself to the task of endeavouring to open Delphine's eyes, respecting Madame de Vernon's real character, I thus addressed her:—"Whatever may be your motives for not providing those who take an interest in your happiness, with the means of completely refuting the mali-

cious insinuations of your enemies, yet true friends can easily silence, when they please, the slanderous tongues of the Parisians. Why, therefore, does not Madame de Vernon, who calls herself your friend, impose silence on the phalanx of fools who attack your reputation? It is true, that distinguished personages are the first objects of their attacks; but they will not make the attempt, unless in those moments when they see them weakly defended by their relations or their friends.

"I have reason to believe," replied Delphine, sinking again into that state of unsociable melancholy, from which she had escaped for some time, "I have reason to consider Madame de Vernon as my friend." "I have not heard it reported," said I, "that she allows herself any sort of censure on your conduct, my dear Delphine: still I have little confidence in her friendship." Her nearest intimates seem ill inclined towards you; and this is almost an infallible indication. People communicate to their nearest friends their real sentiments; and, in her own circle, a woman will procure esteem for another whom she esteems. She praises you considerably, I must own, but it is aloud, and in a manner that displays her wishes that you may hear it repeated to you; but she does not discover, when you are the topic, that conciliating talent which she manifests on other subjects. She frequently says, that you are very beautiful, and very sensible; but it is to women she addresses this eulogium, for the purpose of humbling their vanity. She never says a word of the goodness of your heart, of your gentleness, and that affecting sensibility, which forces those women, who are jealous of your charms, to pardon the superiority you possess above them. Permit me, likewise, to tell you that she commends you with cold indifference, as she would perform a task in which she took no pleasure; and having, as it were, a presentiment that your friendship may terminate on some future day, she shuns, at all hazards, presenting you with weapons against herself, by contributing to establish your reputation."

"If you see these matters in the true light," replied Delphine, "I am only the more miserable on that account. I have always loved, and still love Madame de Vernon, with the most ardent affection; and, if so much attachment and esteem have not conciliated her attachment for me, it is then true, that there is nothing in me which can secure affection; and it follows, that I am not deserving of any love." "My dear Delphine," said I, with some warmth, "you deserve to have friends more than any person in the world; but you are not, as yet, sufficiently acquainted with life. You imagine you have two excellent guides in the goodness of your heart, and your understanding; but it is not sufficient to be amiable and excellent, in order to extricate one's self, successfully, from the difficulties of the world. There are faults which are serviceable

—such as coldness and mistrust, which would shield you better than your fine qualities; and even those fine qualities must be under the direction of a powerful reason. As for myself, as I am not naturally very susceptible of sympathy, I acquired a quick insight into the world; and I request of you to let me communicate my knowledge to you. Madame de Vernon appears to you more worthy of your friendship; she knows better to hold that seducing language to you, which captivates your mind: but I am always the same; I have not imagination enough to assume fictitious sentiments, even were it my desire to do so. I am not now young; my mind is no longer flexible, and it can only move in its usual track; but I know that my advice is necessary for you; and it is with this conviction I solicit your confidence. You have been told, I believe, that I am not apt to put myself forward; I am on the defensive with the world; and so ought every one to be: yet I offer myself to you, my dear Delphine, because you are of a temper that concedes every thing, and abuses nothing. Command my services: if I can be useful to you in any respect, it will be the best employment for my idle existence.”

Madame d'Albemar appeared much affected with these proofs of friendship, and I flattered myself that I had somewhat weakened the force of her blind attachment to Madame de Vernon; but the following day she returned my visit, as it were, solely to acquaint me, that she had seen Madame de Vernon after she quitted me, and was now perfectly assured that Madame de Vernon had done no wrong. “She could not well plead my cause,” continued Madame d'Albemar, “without committing my friends: she has acted well, in conducting herself with prudence, and not giving way to feeling and sentiment.” I must repeat, my dear niece, that it is impossible to deliver Madame d'Albemar from the influence of Madame de Vernon.

I have often remarked, during my intercourse with them, what pains Madame de Vernon takes to engage the affections of Delphine; she is at once sublime, tender, and delicate, with her. She pays her homage to the character of her friend, by imitating every virtue for her sake. As for me, I neither can nor will exhibit myself in any other shape than nature has formed me, that is, affectionate and reasonable, but without any flights of fancy. I am really of more intrinsic value than Madame de Vernon; and Delphine does me injustice in not perceiving it. I hope, nevertheless, one day to obtain Madame d'Albemar's friendship, if any circumstances put it in my power to serve her; I promise you, that I shall watch over her as my own daughter; and you also, my dear niece, you are to be the object of my tender cares, if you continue to listen to my advice, and be directed in your conduct by my instructions.

H. D'ARTENAS,

## LETTER LII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Sept. 3.

No—it is in vain to exact it from me; I have not power to endure so painful an uncertainty. Let him tell me his sentiments; let me know the cause of the extraordinary state in which I find him, and then I will submit to my unhappy fate. But doubt, and uncertainty! that cruel suspense which assumes every form to pursue you, without having a weapon to defend yourself from its attacks. I cannot bring myself to endure it. Those unhappy persons who are condemned to punishment, know at least the crimes for which they suffer; but I am denied this consolation. What appeared to me to be the cause, has no longer any plausibility to induce me to credit it. I will tell you what passed yesterday, and then, if you can, continue to command me to depart without seeing him.

Tancred was the play yesterday, and Madame de Vernon proposed to me to go. I consented, because, of all tragedies, it is that which causes me to weep the most. We sat in Madame de Vernon's box, which is below, near the orchestra.

During the first act, I remarked, at some distance from us, a man who was wrapt up in a cloak, with his head reclined on the foremost seat; he covered his face with his hands, and took every caution to conceal himself. Notwithstanding his efforts, I found him to be Leonce; for there is so much dignity in his figure, that it is impossible to disguise it.

My eyes were fixed on him alone; I could not listen to a word of the piece, but continued still to keep him in my sight. He started at the scene where Tancred becomes acquainted with the infidelity of Amenaïde: his emotion, from that instant, continued to increase, and he endeavoured to escape from all observation; but in vain, for my eyes pursued him. Alas! how much I wished to approach him! and how was I not affected with his tears! They were the first I ever saw shed, by a man so firm and collected; but was it on my account that he wept? Was it possible that he should suffer such agitation, if Matilda could make him happy? Were not his sorrows dedicated to her who understands much better the sentiments of Amenaïde, and who is more worthy to admire, with him, the language which genius lends to love?

At the fourth act he appeared to me to have no longer any power to restrain his feelings. I saw his visage bathed in tears, and I remarked an air of extreme sorrow and anguish over his whole person, which alarmed me considerably. I believe, that in

my concern for him, I made some motion which he observed; for at that very instant he lowered himself in his seat, in order to escape from my observation. But when Tancred, after having fought and triumphed for Amenaïde, returns home with a resolution to die; when a melancholy recollection, the last regret for the loss of love and life, inspires him with these verses, the most affecting that can be conceived:

*Quel charme, dans son crime, à mes esprits rappelle\*  
L'image des vertus que je crus voir en elle!*

“What charm, even in her crimes, recalls to my mind the image of the virtues which I thought she possessed!”

a sigh, a half-stifled groan, issued from the heart of Leonce: every eye was turned on him; he rose with precipitation, and immediately left the house: he faltered in his steps, as he went along, and stopped some time to support himself. His face seemed overspread with a deadly paleness, and as the door was shutting after him, I thought I saw him fall to the ground, through want of strength to support his steps.

Alas! what prevented me from following him? The presence of Madame de Vernon, which fixed my attention, and the curiosity of the spectators, which must have been excited by such a circumstance, restrained me from the attempt. But I never experienced a sympathy more ardent for Leonce: it was sufficient for me, to find him still endowed with sensibility, without recollecting that it was not now for my sake, and that he had voluntarily formed that connexion which must se-

\* LINES OF TANCRED, Act IV. Scene II.

*Quel charme, dans son crime, à mes esprits rappelle  
L'image des vertus que je crus voir en elle!  
Toi qui me fais descendre avec tant de tourment  
Dans l'horreur du tombeau, dont jet'ai délivrer,  
Odieuse coupable!—et peut-être adorée!  
Toi qui fais mon destin, jusqu'au dernier moment!  
Ah! s'il étoit possible, ah! si tu pouvois être  
Ce que mes yeux trompés t'ont vu toujours paroître!  
Non, ce n'est qu'en mourant que je peux t'oublier!*

What charm, even in her crimes, recalls to my mind the image of the virtues which I thought she possessed! O thou who deliverest me in the midst of torments, to the gloomy horrors of the tomb, from which I have rescued thee, thou odious and guilty creature, and yet still perhaps adored! thou commandest my destiny, even to the verge of life! Alas! were it still possible that thou mightest be, what my deluded eyes have painted to my fancy! But no—it is in death alone I shall be able to forget thee!

parate us for ever. I returned home with haste, and finding myself alone, I began to reflect with deep meditation on the strange circumstance that had taken place. I imagined that I perceived some connexion between the lines that made such an impression on Leonce, and the sentiments which he would naturally feel, if he loved me still, and considered me in a guilty light. But still, however extravagant he may be with respect to worldly virtues, he cannot reasonably apply the name of Guilty to the conduct which I had adopted. No—said I with vehemence, I have been calumniated to him, though I know not in what manner: I must therefore be heard in my defence: I must justify myself to him at all hazards. No sense of duty whatsoever, my dear Louisa, shall induce me to consent that he shall form an unjust opinion of me: let me die, so that he but regrets my loss; let me not be required to live, if I am to live with his contempt.

When I recollect, however, the letter which he has answered, the thought of writing to him, and desiring to see him, makes me ready to die with shame. Whatever may happen, Madame de Vernon shall not be the confidant of my present thoughts; I know not what she may say, or what secret opinion she may entertain: it is the voice of Leonce alone that can persuade me now: from him alone I shall learn, whether he loves me or hates me, whether he is unhappy or unjust. It is to him—What then! shall I bid defiance to every sentiment of reserve, shall I go to implore an explanation from a character so suspicious, so rigid, and so haughty? Alas! what a cruel perplexity! How shall I ever be able to extricate myself?

Tell me not that all is over, that he is married, and that I must renounce his good opinion as well as his love. His esteem is still the only blessing I possess on earth: he wishes to unite the suffrages of all in his favour; I only want his suffrage, and I must carry it with me into my retreat. If I do not obtain it, I shall be ever a prey to restless agitation: I shall not even possess the repose which misery itself may give, when there is nothing farther to be done, or nothing more to be hoped. I shall never be resigned to my lot, and with my expiring breath, my last word shall be an attempt to justify myself to Leonce.

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## LETTER LIII.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Sep. 4, 1790.

I SEND you a messenger, who has orders to return in twenty-four hours, with a letter from you. You have sent me no



answer this week past to the letters which I have written to you on the subject of what passed between Madame d'Albemar and myself. What is the motive of your silence? Why have you not answered my letters? Do you think me unjust to Delphine? and if you think me so, do you imagine that telling me of it would do me any injury?

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## LETTER LIV.

M. BARTON IN REPLY TO LEONCE.

Mondeville, Sept. 6.

You do wrong in attaching so much importance to a silence of a few days; I suffer continually from my arm, and I find it painful to write until I am perfectly cured.

You are the husband of Mademoiselle de Vernon, who is a very virtuous person, and wonderfully attached to you: I think, therefore, you should no longer keep in memory the circumstances that preceded your marriage. I cannot minutely examine matters at a distance; what you have told me is not sufficient to enable me to form a judgment on a woman to whom I have vowed attachment and esteem; but what I am perfectly certain of, is, that even she at present wishes you to be occupied with your own welfare, and that of Matilda; and that you should entirely forget the affection you might reasonably have felt for each other, when you were both at liberty.

I conjure you, my dear Leonce, to tranquillize your mind on this subject. The time is past for the object you desired; your destiny is irrevocably fixed, and so is your duty as a man. Call to mind what your own constant opinions were on the nature of the ties which you have contracted, and reflect on the necessity of submitting, when passion blinds us, to the judgment which we pronounce in the calm moments of reason. I am sorry that I am not in a state fit to travel; I might hope that our conversations together might be serviceable to you. Adieu.

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## LETTER LV.

MADAME DE R\*\*\* TO MADAME D'ARTENAS.

Sept. 14.

I ARRIVED, two days ago, to see you, my dear aunt, and was told at your house that you were in the country: you ought

to have informed me of this circumstance, as I returned to Paris for the express purpose of seeing you. When I find you alone, I shall explain to you my opinion on retirement; and you will encourage me to speak to you on this subject, however painful it may be to me.

I began by inquiring about Madame d'Albemar, but I do not wish to call on her myself. Alas! I am but too sensible, that her connexion with me will be injurious to her; however, my heart entertains no sentiment more lively, than the interest which I feel in her fate. Madame de Vernon invited me yesterday to a grand assembly at her house, and I went there with the hopes of meeting Madame d'Albemar, who did not come. On crossing Madame de Vernon's apartments, I recollected the last time I came there, on the day of the grand-ball, in which Delphine excited so much admiration, and manifested so visibly her attachment to M. de Mondeville. I was reflecting on the unexpected events which took place after that day, when M. de Mondeville entered the room with his wife.

I have told you, I believe, my dear aunt, that the first time I saw Leonce, I was so struck with the beauty and majesty of his aspect, that the sudden impression which I experienced made me reflect with bitterness on the misfortunes of my life. I thought myself unworthy of engaging the attention of such a man, and Madame d'Albemar seemed to be the only woman who deserved his notice. But, yesterday, the expression of his countenance was entirely altered: the beauty of his features still remained; but his gloomy and wandering looks were fixed on no woman in the room. He paid his addresses to the company in a hasty manner, and went and sat in a retired corner of the apartment, where he had nobody to speak to. Madame de Mondeville went up to him; I do not know what she said, but he answered her in a mild tone; and when she quitted him, he sighed as if labouring under secret uneasiness and constraint.

Madame de Vernon, at one time, wished to introduce her son-in-law to a strange lady who was unacquainted with him: I thought I could perceive in the deportment of Leonce, a secret repugnance to be presented as a newly married man. He kept behind, and followed with reluctance, and answered rather awkwardly to any thing that resembled congratulations.

Madame du Marset, who was placed at my side, perceived that I remarked attentively both M. and Madame de Mondeville, and, smiling, said to me in a whisper: "I have paid the new-married couple a visit twice or thrice, and have seen them several times at Madame de Vernon's. There is nothing so singular as the conduct of Leonce: I think he wishes to be, according to the expression of the Duc de B——, *as little married as possible*. He avoids, with extraordinary care, the so-

ciety, and even the ordinary occupations of his wife. Matilda, charmed with his mildness, his politeness, and the freedom he allows her, does not perceive his indifference for her, and the dread he has of drawing closer the ties which unite them, by making use of the privileges of his state. She really loves her husband, and is firmly persuaded of his affection; for these devotees have a wonderful faculty of believing! Leonce appears to be in constant expectation of some extraordinary event, and is only now and then to be seen in his house. He makes no domestic arrangements; he has not even opened his chest of books: no part of his furniture is in its proper place. These are trifling observations, but they do not prove the less the state of his mind. Every circumstance that reminds him of his situation is painful to him; and, though unable to alter it, he avoids as much as possible those daily occurrences which represent to him the greatest misfortune of his life, that is, his marriage: in short, I can assure you, that he is a most unhappy man."

I was going to reply to Madame de Vernon, and to question her still more, but our conversation was immediately interrupted. As there was a number of young persons in the room, a dance was proposed. One lady went to the harpsichord, another took up the harp. I fixed my eyes on Leonce, who was seeking some pretext to leave the room; but he was detained, unmercifully, by an old man who was conversing with him. I could see that a dance would revive painful sensations in Leonce's heart; and I hoped no one would propose it to him, when Madame du Marset took Matilda's hand, and, placing it in Leonce's, said to them both:—"Come, young married folks, let us see you dance together." "Bravo!" resounded from every side: "let us see them dance." The music strikes up, and the company draws back, to make room, and leaves Leonce and Matilda together in the middle of the apartment.

All this passed so rapidly, and Leonce was so absorbed in thought, that he did not, at first, discover the intention of the company: but when he heard the music, and saw the circle formed round him, and Matilda preparing herself to dance, being seized, as it were, with a sentiment of terror, and struck with the recollection of Delphine, which every circumstance tended to revive in him, he threw back Matilda's hand with violence, retired a few steps from her, and suddenly returning, left the room in an instant, and flung himself into the garden. The circle which surrounded him opened suddenly, to let him pass; and such was the impression made by the violence of his action, that nobody had an idea of saying a word, to request of him to stop.

Madame de Vernon, perceiving the astonishment of the company, took the first opportunity to tell them, that M. de Mondeville could not bear to be the object of general attention,

and that he was very timid, notwithstanding the good grounds he might have to be otherwise. Every person appeared to believe what she said; and, strange as it is, Matilda, who certainly loves her husband, was the first to be completely at her ease, and began to dance on the spot where Leonce had so suddenly quitted her.

I went out to take the air, and, at the end of the garden, I found Leonce sitting on a bench, in profound meditation. He saw me at the moment that I turned aside, in order not to disturb him; and he, who never till this time had addressed a word to me, came up to me, and spoke to me thus: "Madame de R\*\*\*, the last time I had the pleasure of seeing you, you were in company with Madame d'Albemar: do you recollect the circumstance?" "Yes, certainly," replied I, "and I shall never forget it." "Well, then," said he, "sit down on this bench with me, if it will not be disagreeable to you to leave the ball." I repeated several times to him, that it would be no trouble to me: yet, when we were seated together, he remained silent, and seemed not to recollect that he had desired to speak to me. I felt an embarrassment which was rather painful to me, and was in a hurry to extricate myself from it, in my old wild and coquetish manner; for it is a piece of coquetry, to speak to a man about his attachment, even for another woman.—"What then has happened to you," said I, "during my absence? I thought that Madame d'Albemar loved you, and that you returned her affection: on my return, after a month's absence in the country, every thing is changed. A cruel accident makes a dreadful noise in the world.—Madame d'Albemar, according to report, was to marry M. de Serbellane: I find you the husband of Matilda, and still you are in sorrow; Madame d'Albemar does not depart, nor does she see any person. What can be the reason of this apparent mystery?" Leonce reassumed that air of reserve which he had for a moment discarded, and said to me with great indifference:—"Madame d'Albemar will be very happy in the choice which she has made of M. de Serbellane."—"Nobody shall put it out of my mind," replied I, "that she prefers you before all the world; but it is of no service to talk about it now, as you are married: so farewell." I rose to go away, but Leonce held me by the gown, and said:—"You are a very good-hearted creature, Madame de R\*\*\*, although you have a little levity; but if you do not wish to make me uneasy, explain yourself a little more." "I know nothing about these matters, I assure you," said I; "I only recollect having seen Madame d'Albemar cross the ball-room the night you were taken ill, after having danced with her. The emotion she betrayed on that occasion could only proceed from a true, a pure, and devoted attachment; such as is experienced," added I, with a sigh,

“when the heart is not become insensible, after a continued succession of vain illusions. It is possible she may have had prior engagements with M. de Serbellane; but I am convinced that she will never marry him, because she loves you only, and has broken off her acquaintance with him entirely on your account.”

Leonce seemed to be struck with what I told him; and Madame de Vernon coming to rejoin us, I entered the ball-room, and said nothing farther to M. de Mondeville that night, unless at the moment of my departure, when he had finished a long conversation with his mother-in-law.

“Do not listen too much to Madame de Vernon,” said I to him, in a low voice; “I distrust her very much, even in her friendship for Madame d’Albemar. She is very politic and profound: she is not much troubled with devotion: she has no fixed principles of any kind, and has a great capacity and understanding. She never loved her husband, and yet was never known to have had a lover. Be diffident of such characters as these: they must employ their activity in some manner or another. Believe me, such poor creatures as myself, who have done ourselves only injury, have never been employed in procuring mischief to others.”—“Alas!” replied Leonce, in giving me his hand to conduct me to my carriage, “there is probably a life, whose destiny will be decided by the words you have spoken with so much gaiety and unconcern.”

Madame de Mondeville departed at the same time with me: she expressed her displeasure, in a very visible manner, at the politeness shown to me by Leonce. It was not jealousy that troubled her: your poor niece will never be remarked for attracting Leonce’s attention; but Madame de Mondeville, before her marriage as well as since, has never failed to exercise towards me the full rigour of her prudery. I deserve it, perhaps; but how much better does not the charming Delphine, as pure as Matilda, and a thousand times more amiable, understand the art of making virtue beloved!

Farewell, my dear aunt; return, I beseech you, soon: I promise you, with certainty, that henceforth I shall dedicate my days entirely to your happiness. CECILIA DE R.

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## LETTER LVI.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, September 15.

I HAVE at last determined, my dear master, on the resolution which I mean to adopt; I shall see Madame d’Albemar

before I depart for Spain. A woman whom, during the happy period of my life, I should not have permitted to pronounce the name of Delphine, Madame de R\*\*\*, has explained to me, I think, the contradictions which astonished in the character of Madame d'Albemar. Before my arrival, she had contracted some engagements with M. de Serbellane; but, it is true that she loved me afterwards; and perhaps this idea had offended M. de Serbellane, and that they are now on bad terms together. Her stay at Bellerive, her anxiety and embarrassment on seeing me, and every circumstance, may be explained, if in reality she reproaches herself for not having been sufficiently frank with me.

Yet I can no longer feel that boundless enthusiasm for her, which represented her to me as a sublime creature; but is it not clear, if she has sacrificed her engagements with M. de Serbellane to her attachment to me, that I still entertain a profound regard for her? However—did she not know me, when her lover passed twenty-four hours in her house? Oh! infernal thought! Let me discard it, if possible. I wish to see Delphine again, that fallen angel, that still retains some remnant of her origin.

I must, moreover, make some excuses to her, before I quit her for ever: she was grieved, perhaps, when she discovered that I was the husband of Matilda. It was a very abrupt action for me to marry, and to break with her, without letting her know a single word about my design.

Madame de Vernon pressed me again, very strongly, yesterday, to go to Spain: she fears, I believe, I may reproach her with her continual losses at play. Her uneasiness is ill-founded: this is the time to have disputes with me: I recollect nothing, and am insensible to every thing that passes. But why did Madame de Vernon never tell me, that Delphine loved me, and wished, for my sake, to break off with her former choice? Was Madame de Vernon afraid that I should consent to replace M. de Serbellane, after all that had passed? That was knowing me but little! Still she ought to have furnished me with a sentiment of comfort, when I was irritated and devoured with misery and anguish; when a single word to allay my passions, would have been more acceptable to me, than a drop of water in the midst of deserts.

The consolation which I require, I shall, perhaps, find in a few hours' conversation with Madame d'Albemar. I am therefore resolved to write to her, to request her to receive me at Bellerive. It is not at Paris, it is in a place of solitude and retirement I wish to speak with her: she will return to Bellerive to-morrow, and my letter will reach her the day after, as soon as she is up.

You have no reason to be alarmed, my dear master, for my

fortitude, on the occasion of this explanation. I may learn that Delphine still loves me, and yet my resolutions shall not be altered. She can no longer show herself in the light I first viewed her, and the idea of perfection which I attached to her, could alone decide my fate. If, as I have reason to hope, Madame d'Albemar consents to receive me, and discovers much sorrow for the loss of me, I shall be able to trace a plan of life for myself, which shall be sorrowful, but calm. I shall depart for Spain, and stay there some years, though Madame de Mondeville may go with me. I must quit France, after seeing Madame d'Albemar; we shall separate without reproaches—I shall be resigned to my lot; my sorrows will not terminate: but do not the generality of mankind pass their lives with a painful sensation rankling in their hearts?

Blame me not, I say once more, blame me not: people of violent passions ought to be allowed to seek some new arrangement of mind and temper, which may render their existence tolerable. Do you imagine that I can live much longer in the state I have been for these two months past? I must have some other impression, even if it be grief, I must have it! You know I possess energy and firmness; I know how to suffer, and I must now inform you, that I was on the point of sinking under the weight of my miseries; and this cry for mercy escapes from me, only after the most violent struggles, that character and sentiment, reason and patience, had ever to encounter.

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## LETTER LVII.\*

M. DE SERBELLANE TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Lisbon, Sept. 4, 1790.

I TAKE the liberty to request of you, madam, the most important service you can do me, and the only one which can avert the irreparable evils with which I am threatened.

Theresa, having decided on the future destination of her daughter, when she was passing some months on her estate, in the neighbourhood of Bourdeaux, is desirous of obtaining from her husband's family permission to confide the education of Isore to you; and having settled her mind in peace, with

\* This letter was sent the 16th of September, in the evening, to Madame d'Albemar.

respect to the destiny of the child, she is determined to become a nun, and to take the veil in a convent, of which father Antonio, her present confessor, has the direction. Thus shall the most excellent and amiable creature that Heaven ever formed, be dead to the world, and to me? Could the God whom Theresa adores be a God of clemency and compassion, if he should impose so heavy a punishment on her?

The barbarous customs of civilized society made Theresa the wife of a man unworthy of her, at the early age of fourteen. Nature, by giving birth to M. d'Erwins, twenty-five years before Theresa, seemed to have intended that they should not be united together; but the odious calculations of a cold-hearted family have bound them together, and Theresa would be considered criminal, had she chosen me for her companion through life.

It is impossible for her, I must own, to assume the title of my wife, and to appear as such in the world at large: public morals must be respected, which forbid a proceeding of this nature; and though this species of morality be often inconsistent, both in the austerities it imposes, and the indulgences it allows, yet she must not bid defiance to it, as it approaches to the nature of some virtues in the opinion of its most steady votaries. But still, what sense of duty or morality can prevent Theresa from changing her name, and going to America with me, to be married to me there, and established for life? You will consider this project somewhat romantic, and rather contradictory to my usual habits and character; however, I consider it the offspring of mature reflection, and as inspired by a sentiment of perfect honour. Having, unguardedly, caused the misery of an innocent person, I ought to consecrate my life to her, as far as my life can contribute, in any degree, to her happiness. Moreover, as the disposition of my soul renders me little capable of very lively passions, it tends also to make my sacrifices lighter to me. Europe, as well as America, in short, all countries in the world, are equal to me. When one has acquired a thorough knowledge of mankind, it is impossible to feel a very strong sentiment of preference for any one particular nation before others; and the habit which gives rise to such a preference, no longer exists in me, as I have been constantly employed in travelling. Perhaps, also, it is not a disagreeable sensation, when remorse does not pursue us, to break through the relations which length of time makes us contract with society; to extricate ourselves from that multitude of painful recollections which distress the soul, and often stifle its most generous emotions. I shall replace myself in the midst of nature, with an amiable being, who shall participate all my impressions. I shall experience on earth, what forms, perhaps, the best idea of a



future state, that is, oblivion of every thing, except sympathy and virtue.

Theresa is much more worthy of the destiny which I propose to her, than any other woman on earth. By shutting herself up in a convent, for the rest of her days, she discovers more courage to face misery, than I require of her to obtain her happiness: a principle of duty, fortified by religion, can alone, I am certain, determine her to sacrifice herself in such a manner; but what is the nature of this duty, and to what sort of atonement is she bound? what benefit can result to the living, or the dead, from the misery she wishes to endure? If she imagines she has done wrong, why not repair her supposed errors, by active virtues? We can employ in America the fortune I possess, in useful establishments, and acts of an enlightened benevolence. That Theresa will not fulfil the duties mankind have imposed on her, I will allow; but those which she herself has chosen, those which her heart allows her to perform, to those she will continue inflexible.

I am determined to see her; it is the only method which I have left, to induce her to renounce her cruel resolution. I am persuaded every other attempt will be ineffectual: my letters have produced no effect; the spectacle of my sorrow only can affect her heart. Obtain for me, madam, I entreat you, a safe conduct for fifteen days in France. The Tuscan Envoy will demand it, if you desire him: I had intentions of returning without these wretched precautions; but, on Theresa's account, I was alarmed for the noise my imprisonment would occasion, if M. d'Ervin's family should obtain an order for it. I think the intention of this family is to persecute Theresa, but such a motive would never engage her to confide herself to me: it is my wretchedness alone which can operate upon her, and there is not in being a more wretched person than myself.

Since a premature experience has given me, at an early season, the qualities peculiar to old age, by discouraging the illusions of hope; I have not wearied Heaven by that variety of prayers and wishes, which young men indulge; I only requested one favour, which was, never to have to reproach myself with the misery of another; for remorse is the only suffering of the soul, which time and reflection will never be able to sooth. This remorse is determined to pursue me; it is in vain for me to have subdued the vivacity of my sentiments: reason will destroy the illusive charms of pleasure, without softening the asperity of my misfortunes.

The image of the sweet, the angelic Theresa, sacrificing her youth, burying herself in obscurity—this image, shrouded in the shades of death, will pursue me to the tomb.

You, madam, who are guided by the genius of goodness, the passion for virtue, and by the pure soul of an angel, do

you assist me on this occasion. I send you a faithful friend, who, having delivered you this letter, and received your answer, will return to the frontiers of France, where I shall be in waiting for him. It is to him only you will please to give the safe conduct, which I so ardently desire. You will obtain it, for nothing can be refused to your entreaties, and you will save Theresa and me from misery and eternal punishment.

CH. DE SERBELLANE.

P. S. It is expedient that Madame d'Ervin's should not know my intention of returning to France.

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## LETTER LVIII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, September 17.

THE connexion which I have lately formed, must henceforth forbid me to take any farther interest in your destiny: but I hope you will not refuse me the satisfaction of being acquainted with your sentiments on this occasion. Indulge me with a few moments' conversation with you alone, at any hour you may please to appoint. I shall set out for Spain, after having the happiness of seeing you; this favour, which I now request, shall be the last concern you will ever have with my unhappy life. I cannot possibly entertain any doubts with respect to the wrongs you have done yourself as well as me; but if you should feel any uneasiness on my account, if I could induce myself to pardon you, I should proceed on my journey with more calmness, and perhaps with less misery.

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## LETTER LIX.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

September 17.

PARDON me!—strange expression!—I will see you, sir; though your note, perhaps, has not deserved an answer. I must, however, come to an explanation with you, for the sake

of my own dignity. This present day I mean to dedicate to those duties of friendship, which you shall never teach me to neglect; but to-morrow, select the moment which you will prefer for the interview. I shall compel you, as I hope, to restore me that esteem which is my due; and it is with this view only, that I consent to meet you. I do not well conceive what questions you intend to ask me, respecting my future lot; but it is easy for you to anticipate it. I am going to pass the remainder of my days with my sister-in-law; and I feel no longer any interest, or even hope of happiness, in a world in which my confidence has been abused.

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## LETTER LX.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

17th Sept. (in the evening.)

LEONCE has written to me, to request an interview; and I have not hesitated to consent to it: what is more, I considered it as a favour from Heaven, to have an opportunity presented to me, of knowing the injuries of which he accuses me, and of answering with truth and frankness, and, it may be, with a becoming dignity and pride.

Do not give yourselves up to any uneasiness, my dear sister, because I have not yielded to your counsels. Leonce is no longer formidable, whatever sentiments he may express for me: if he should wish to make me contemptible by that love, which might have been my glory and happiness . . . . . No, Leonce, no—she whom you have deemed unworthy of being your wife, will not accept your repentance, if you should really feel it: I am not like you, inexorable: toward violations of the rules of convenience, towards faults of appearance only, and actions condemned by the world, but justified by the heart: I shall make it evident to you, that true virtue has the greater influence over my mind, only because I abjure every other authority. This Delphine that you think so weak, and so easily deluded, will be courageous and resolute against the most impassioned sentiment of her heart—against you:—yes, I shall be so, my dear sister, although I should surrender my life in order to obtain a single hour, in which I could persuade myself that he loves me still, and is not the husband of Matilda.

To-morrow Leonce is to appear: I have had this day sufficient resolution to endeavour to procure a safe-conduct for M. de Serbellane, to enable him to return to France. He conjured me by

letter to obtain this favour for him; and I found his request natural and reasonable; for, in my opinion, which is likewise his, there is no other method of preventing Theresa taking the veil. She has not, as yet, intrusted me with this fatal resolution; but M. de Serbellane has written to me, that he has heard it from her; and every observation I have made, leads to confirm the idea. I have been to Paris this morning, to speak to the Tuscan Envoy: he was not at home; but as he is to pass the evening at Madame de Vernon's, I have begged her to deliver him a letter from me, which contains my request for M. de Serbellane, and to second my petition when she presents it. Madame de Vernon will succeed in this affair, as well as I could myself; and in such trouble as I am, it would be impossible for me to appear in public.

I have returned this evening to Bellerive: it is now late: the day which precedes to-morrow is on the point of closing: the agitation of my heart is violent, and yet I feel no uncertainty. I expect no novelty, only a little more or less of grief, in a separation without hope. Watch over me, from the summit of Heaven, my dear sister; and your brother too, my protector, support me in this crisis. He will not endure that Delphine, so unfortunate, and still so pure and irreproachable, should dishonour his cares for her sake, his goodness and affection, by indulging for a moment any guilty sentiments! I cannot well express what I feel in this dreadful moment of expectation, which suspends all the powers of the soul; but when Leonce arrives, I shall recover my fortitude; and if virtue ordains that I shall see him to-morrow for the last time of my life, my dear Louisa, I am willing to obey.

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## LETTER LXI.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Sept. 18, at midnight.

I WAS in the wrong, my dear sister, truly in the wrong, to give myself any concern about the conduct I should adopt to M. de Mondeville. He was prepared to spare me that trouble; he only wished, I think, to make the experiment, whether I was weak enough to consent to see him once more. He has played with my feelings in the most insulting manner: he departed last night for Spain—last night! and on this day the appointment—Alas! all this is too much; my soul is totally altered; however, I will speak to you about him with coldness.

and disdain. His departure is a thousand times worse than his marriage! no error of any description can account for it! it is nothing but cold and thoughtless barbarity; it does not even bear the aspect of his usual faults. I have been indeed cruelly deceived; I have embraced the most noble, the most seducing illusions in the place of his real character; and this illusion I must renounce, as well as every other which the heart so passionately indulges. As long as we are doomed to live, we must reject the affections which are connected with our ideas of happiness; for they no sooner promise the accomplishment of our wishes, than they instantly deceive our flattering expectations. Farewell, Louisa; my sentiments are all bitterness, and I dread to express them. Farewell.

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## LETTER LXII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Sept. 21.

I HAVE not been able to write to you for these two days; and fearing that a longer silence would give you some uneasiness, I do not wish to protract it: but what can I say on the present occasion! Nothing, absolutely nothing: there is nothing, even in my life of grief, to communicate to you. I feel a disquiet for myself, since I can no longer think of him; there is nothing in my heart or mind, which now interests me. As Theresa stops some time with me, I cannot depart immediately; and moreover, Madame de Vernon is taken ill, and perhaps ruined for ever. It is my earnest desire to console her in her troubles, and thus make some reparation to her for the unjust suspicions I had entertained. There is still in my power some fortune, and some attention to bestow; and I wish to do good to somebody with what still remains in my hands, and above all to Madame de Vernon, if it be possible. I am surprised that I am able to serve any person in the world; and if I can do any good, I am bound to perform it.

I shall endeavour to engage Madame de Vernon to take an excursion into the southern provinces, as something of this kind is requisite for the alarming state of her breast. If she has deranged her circumstances, I shall offer her what services I can render her; but I shall not pretend to offer her any counsel on her future conduct in life.

Alas! am I capable of judging, or of discovering truth? on what subject shall any one refer to my opinion, since I am inca-

pable of directing myself? My head is disordered; I observe nothing that passes, and I take for realities the offspring of my own imagination. My heart is still alive to sensibility, but ready to be torn away by any invader! I declare to you, my dear Louisa, that I am nothing now but a tolerable creature, that is in need of instruction, and of whom nobody must ever speak as a woman that was once distinguished on any account whatsoever.

I feel still a sort of desire to give you an account of the last hours, the remembrance of which I wish to preserve; those, I mean, which have closed the history of my life. You must not either be ignorant of every thing I have experienced during the course of my existence; only do not answer me on this subject. Speak to me about yourself alone, and concerning what I may be able to do for you. Say nothing to me about myself: there is no longer a Delphine, since there is no Leonce! Fear, hope, and every other sentiment, has vanished with my esteem for him, and left the world and my heart completely empty to me.

For my own punishment, I must confess, that on the day I expected the interview with him, he was dearer to me than at any other moment of my life. From the very instant of sun-rise, what interest did I not feel in every hour that elapsed! In what different manners did I not calculate the probable moment of his arrival! At first it appeared to me that he would arrive at the hour he might suppose to be that of my rising, in order to secure the certainty of seeing me alone. When that hour was passed, I imagined that I was wrong in fancying that he would choose it, and I relied on seeing him between twelve and three o'clock. At the slightest noise that I heard, I began to combine a thousand minute reasons for his coming on horseback, or by a carriage. I did not go to Theresa's, nor did I open a book; I did not even walk; but stood immovable where I had a prospect of the road. As the village clock of Bellerive strikes only the half-hours, I kept my watch before me, and looked at it, when my eyes could quit the window. Sometimes I fixed in my mind a certain space of time, which I determined to devote to the consideration of different ideas; yet this period proved precisely the moment of my most violent agitation.

The most painful idea that I endured was, perhaps, at the moment of sun-set. I had seen the sun rise that morning, and my heart was soothed with the most pleasing sensations of hope; but when he disappeared, he carried with him every sentiment with which his early aspect had inspired me. However, to this hour of discouragement succeeded shortly an idea that revived me: I was surprised at myself, for not reflecting that Leonce would choose the night-time, in order to

converse the longer with me; and I relapsed into that most cruel situation of all, when hope itself is as painful as uncertainty.

The darkness prevented me from distinguishing, at a distance, the different objects around me; and I was now reduced to attend to some confused sounds that were heard in the country; and the nearer night approached, the more uniform and oppressive were the pangs that I experienced. How much did I not regret the loss of day—of that day, the single hours of which had hung so heavy on me!

At last, I hear a carriage approaching; it comes up to our door, and I have no longer any doubts. I hear them coming up my stairs, but I dare not advance a step. My servants open the folding-doors, carrying lights, and I behold Madame de Mondeville and Madame de Vernon entering! It is impossible to paint to you the sensations of my soul, when after the cruel punishment of suspense, I passed through every stage of hope that announced the end of my misery; and finding myself suddenly deceived, I was thrown back into a state of agony a thousand times more devoted to despair than I was before the momentary consolation which relieved me, only to sink me deeper in distress.

I had not strength sufficient to support myself at this interview. The idea that Leonce was coming, presented itself to me, and that he would immediately depart on finding that I was not alone, and I should therefore lose, perhaps for ever, the opportunity of speaking to him. I received Madame de Mondeville, and her mother with incredible inattention: I rose, and sat down again; I got up to ring, I called for tea—and recollecting all at once that this preparation might induce them to stay, I asked them, whether it was their intention to return to Paris that night. They had just arrived, and nothing could be more absurd than such a question; but I was not able to support the repugnant passions and sentiments which their presence exposed me to.

Madame de Vernon approached me with the most amiable attention, in order to call me aside, when Madame de Mondeville anticipated her, and said to me: "I have wished to accompany my mother here this evening; it was her intention to come alone, but I was in want of your society, to relieve me from the uneasiness I have suffered this morning, from learning that my husband has been obliged to set out for Spain this night. On hearing these words, a sudden darkness overspread my eyes, and I could discern nothing around me. Madame de Mondeville would have perceived my condition, had not her mother, with that promptitude and quickness of apprehension which belong exclusively to her, placed herself between her daughter and me, when I was sinking back into my chair, and

instantly requested her daughter to go and tell a servant to bring a letter, which she had left, through forgetfulness, in her chaise.

While Matilda was absent, Madame de Vernon carried me, in a manner, in her arms, into the next chamber, and said to me: "Wait for me awhile, and I shall be with you in an instant." She left me, and went to advise her daughter to retire to the apartment appointed for her, and told her that I was much in want of some repose. Her daughter desired nothing more than to retire, and did not entertain the slightest suspicion of what had happened. Madame de Vernon then returned, but I had scarce recovered my senses; and when she approached me, I forgot entirely the suspicions I had conceived, and threw myself into her arms with the most excessive confidence. Alas! I was in great want of a friend to vent my sorrows to, and I should have compelled her to assume that capacity, had her heart been otherwise inclined. Often did I exclaim in the wildness of my grief: "He is gone, Sophia, he is gone! even on this day, on which he had appointed to see me!—What a cruel insult! what contempt!" I confessed every thing to Madame de Vernon—she had presaged every thing that occurred: she made me perceive, with the utmost delicacy, but at the same time with the most evident marks of truth, to what a degree I was culpable in entertaining suspicions against her. "Do not you see," said she, "what a decided prepossession this man must have formed against you, when he could bring himself to adopt such a mode of conduct? You imagined that he was jealous of M. de Serbellane; but could he be reasonably so, after the confidential communication I had made him on your part? The last note you sent him, in which you announce to him, as you inform me, your resolution to remain in Languedoc, did not this note destroy the effect of every report that was spread about, respecting your pretended journey into Portugal? I must repeat it to you, he is a man who still retains a strong passion for you, a circumstance very natural, but who does not wish to surrender himself to it, because your character is not adapted to his; and, as his inclination draws him towards you, he takes decided steps to extricate himself from the effects of his passion. "There is nobody more violent than Leonce; you know him to be so, and his conduct proves it: he departed this night, without acquainting me with his intentions; he only informed his wife, in a very cold and concise note, that in consequence of a letter from his mother, he was compelled to depart instantaneously; and I know positively from his servants, that he had received no letters from Spain. It must be you, therefore, that he avoided; his very fear is a proof that he dreads your ascendancy, but will not submit to it; though your delicacy might allow you, at present, to consent to desire it."



I was willing to justify myself to Madame de Vernon, from any suspicion that might offend Matilda; but her generous soul was indignant, at my thinking such an explanation requisite. She testified the most perfect esteem for me: the embarrassment which I sometimes remarked in her, was totally dissipated: and through the medium of my grief, I acquired more certainty than ever, that she loved me with tenderness. Alas! her health is very indifferent, for her late hours have considerably injured her breast. I wanted to engage her to speak to me about her affairs and her designs, but she constantly drew the conversation back upon myself, with a peculiar grace, which sits naturally on her; never fatigued in questioning me, sifting me, and discovering all the different shades of my sentiments; attempting sometimes to console me, and forgetting nothing that could be said to a person in my circumstances: in short, without her, I know not whether I should have been able to support this last affliction. My sentiments were sorrowful and humiliating, and Sophia has raised me in my own opinion; she has discovered how to alleviate my sufferings, and to preserve me at least, from an irritability and resentment which would have given an unnatural bias to my character.

My dear Louisa, I deeply felt your absence on these trying occasions, and was compelled to have recourse to other aid; but as Theresa will probably quit me in a month, I shall come and surrender myself to you; and if I cannot endure to live, you will make due allowance for the violence of my despair.

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## LETTER LXIII.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Bourdeaux, September 23.

WOULD you have imagined that it would be from this city you were to receive my first letter? I had appointed an interview with Delphine, and you see that I have departed without seeing her. I travelled without stopping, till I came to this town; it was my intention to have proceeded in the same manner, until I should meet that proud and fortunate man whom they are endeavouring to bring back to France. A sudden fever has seized me with such violence, that I am forced to suspend my journey; but M. de Serbellane passes this way, a circumstance which I had previously discovered; he had sent a message to his friends to that effect: but he is, perhaps, more likely to end his travels in this town.

Yes, I have departed, even at the moment that she consented to see me, when I have every reason to believe that she had prepared some new stratagems to insnare me.

I have departed without regret, but still with a strong sentiment of indignation, which has totally changed my disposition towards her. Read, my dear friend, the following words, which will astonish you much less than they do myself, while I am tracing them—*Madame d'Albemar has neither merited your esteem, nor your love.*

When I had received her answer, in compliance with my desire of seeing her, I did not venture to write to you, my dear M. Barton, immediately, on that subject; but I was not able to contain within my breast the joy which I experienced. I walked about my apartment with a degree of transport which totally overpowered my reflections. Sometimes the lively emotions of bliss oppressed me so violently, that in order to tranquillize my spirits, I endeavoured to recall to my mind every aggravating circumstance in my situation and my connexions. But there are moments in which the soul rejects every painful sensation; and those sad ideas which the day before affected me so profoundly, now only glided over my heart, as if it was invulnerable to their attacks.

I had shut myself up in the apartment, when one of my servants knocked at the door: I started at the sound: every unexpected event tends to alarm me; and I dreaded then the appearance of a letter from Madame d'Albemar: I shrunk even at the idea of a pleasing emotion! A note from Madame de Vernon was handed to me, who wished to see me instantly on a family matter of importance. I could not well avoid going to Madame de Vernon's, who told me immediately the matter in question; and I repented, I confess, having come for such a trivial circumstance. A few moments she called aside the Tuscan Envoy, who was on a visit to her, and begged of me to wait a little, as she had something farther to communicate to me.

I heard her say to the Tuscan Envoy: "This is a letter from Madame d'Albemar, and I beg you will second with your influence at the Minister's, her request in favour of M. de Serbellane." On hearing this name pronounced, I rose; and notwithstanding the rudeness of such a sudden interruption, I went up to Madame de Vernon. She continued to speak while I was near her; and I learned, just Heavens! that Madame d'Albemar had been that morning at the Tuscan Envoy's, to obtain by her credit a safe-conduct to permit M. de Serbellane to return to France, without any molestation on account of his duel. Not having found the Tuscan Envoy at home, she renewed her request by writing to him, and charged Madame de Vernon with delivering the letter. I saw Madame

d'Albemar's hand-writing ; she had obtained the object of her request, and M. de Serbellane is to be in France within a fortnight. He is to be there ; but he will find me on his way ; and I shall compel him to furnish me with some pretext for revenge.

My resolution was immediately decided on : I determined to be beforehand with M. de Serbellane, and to set off without farther delay. Had I stopped a single day, I could not have resisted the vehement desire of seeing Madame d'Albemar, and loading her with the most insulting reproaches. This would also furnish a fresh triumph for her ; but my departure, at the instant when her cold and treacherous letter had granted me an opportunity of seeing her ; this departure, I say, without a word of apology, or consideration for her, will, I hope, mortally offend her.

I have written to Madame de Mondeville, and provided her with some pretext or other for my journey. I took leave of nobody ; and my servants, on receiving my orders respecting my departure, looked at me with every mark of astonishment. Though I fancied myself to be calm, yet I believe some circumstances in my behaviour betrayed the inward emotions of my soul. If I had seen any person, my agitation must have been perceived, and perhaps Delphine might have heard of it ! I desire nothing more, than that she should believe me to be calm and disdainful : if I am to die of the evils that prey upon me, my dear friend, never tell her, I beseech you, that she has been the cause of my death. I demand your oath of secrecy on this subject : I should even feel a kind of rage against the fever which torments me, if I imagined she would attribute it to love.

I wished likewise to remove myself at a distance from Madame de Vernon : she is a woman that I hate, but I make this declaration with a suspicion of its injustice. All the troubles that I have of late experienced, she has been the first to announce to me. Even since my marriage, whenever an idea of any kind, or any circumstance gave me pleasure, chance, by some means or other, brought this woman in the way to deceive me by the truth ; I confess, the real truth ; but of such a nature, that you cannot listen to it without detesting your informant. Do not attack me for this prejudice, for I condemn it myself ; but what do I not condemn in my own conduct ? and yet I cannot master my passions and inclinations. Happy would it be for me, if I were to die on this occasion ! Do not, however, fear that M. de Serbellane will kill me. No—it is not reasonably to be expected that he should succeed in every enterprise : I think he has enjoyed prosperity and good fortune enough already ; and, if he sets a foot in France, I am determined he shall find the termination of his career.

## LETTER LXIV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, October 2.

WELL! Theresa continues inflexible! She, for whom I have sacrificed all the happiness of my life, is not to enjoy, for a single hour, the fruit of my devoted attachment, and of my too easy friendship! My dear Louisa, the recital I shall make to you, will excite your compassion for Theresa; but, alas! Delphine has a stronger claim on your sympathy. Ah! what a scene of misery and misfortune on the earth! We may naturally ask, where are the happy to be found? Or, are they only among those who are really worthy of happiness?

For some time past, I have seldom visited Madame d'Ervin: a priest, from a neighbouring convent, of a simple and reverend exterior, continued to pass a good part of his time with her alone; while I, overwhelmed with grief, was fearful, if I confided my sorrows to Theresa, that I could not conceal from her, that she was the innocent and involuntary cause of my misfortunes. I relied on the arrival of M. de Serbellane, and on his entreaties, to induce her to renounce her resolution; but M. d'Ervin's brother having arrived at Paris, Theresa had yesterday a long conversation with him, and I hurried to her house as soon as he departed, to endeavour to learn the result.

I have recorded all the words of Theresa, and I shall transmit them faithfully to you. Alas! who could forget such expressions, so full of love, and the spirit of repentance! "I have appeased the anger of M. d'Ervin's brother," said she to me; "and now that he knows my resolution, he feels no longer any hatred against me. This resolution makes peace between me and my enemies, and God who inspires it, will render it efficacious; but you, to whom I owe so much—you, who have perhaps made more sacrifices on my account than you will acknowledge to me—you have been on the point of ruining me by an impulse of your goodness. You have encouraged M. de Serbellane to return, for so I have learned in time, but it will be in my power to forbid him to come. He shall be informed that, if he comes to see me, it will be in vain for him to attempt to make me change my resolution; but that he might, by his arrival, rekindle the resentment of M. d'Ervin's relations, and ruin my daughter, in bringing disgrace on her unhappy mother."

I wished to interrupt her several times, but she stopped me short; "Come to-morrow," said she, "immediately after you

rise, and we shall take a walk together. I shall then communicate to you every sentiment I feel; but I have no power to do so on the present occasion. It seems to me, that on the approach of night, the presence of a protecting Deity is less sensibly felt; and I have need of his support, to enable me to announce my resolutions with confidence and courage to you. To-morrow, therefore, I am with you with the dawn of day, and with the sun."

When she had quitted me, I began to reflect with bitterness on the obstacles which her religious fervour would oppose to my efforts; and I lamented the sorrowful destiny of two noble creatures, Theresa, and my friend. It was I, wretched I, who was to endeavour to support the courageous resolution of Madame d'Ervin's, and my despairing heart was commissioned to console her! Alas! how often in life is this example presented, and how many victims of misery have learned the art of relieving such unhappy creatures as themselves!

I entered Theresa's apartment very early next day, and found her already quite dressed, praying, in her closet, before a crucifix which she had placed there, and at the feet of which she had been shedding a flood of tears. She rose, on my appearance: and, opening her bureau, she addressed me thus: "There you see, are all the letters which I have received these two months past from M. de Serbellane; I deliver them over to you, with his portrait: it is not required of you to burn them; preserve them, in order that they may survive me, and that nothing belonging to him may perish before me. I insisted on showing her M. de Serbellane's letter to me; and, while reading it, she blushed, and turned pale alternately. "He has made me, in his letters," continued she, "the offer which you mention; he has made it to me with more ardent expressions, and more affecting sensibility, and still my resolutions have remained inflexible. Let us go down into the garden, I do not find myself well here: the air will give me fresh force, and I feel the want of it to enable me to open once more to you a heart which is on the point of being closed for all eternity. I followed her steps; her fine black hair, the paleness of her complexion, her looks, which alternately depicted love and devotion, gave her, in my eyes, a characteristic expression of beauty which I had never witnessed in her before. We sat down under some trees, which still retained their verdant leaves; and Theresa, turning towards the horizon, her looks so truly full of inspiration, bespoke me thus:

"My dear Delphine, I can confidently assure you, in the presence of this sun, which seems to listen to us in the name of his divine Master, that the object of my unhappy love is not as yet erased from my heart: before the venerable priest had accepted the vow which I have made to consecrate my-

self to God, I demanded of him, whether, among the duties I was going to impose on myself, there might be one which might allow me to indulge the recollections which I am not able to suppress. He replied, that the sacrifice of my whole life was the only one that was in my power; he permitted me to mingle with the tears which I shed for my faults, some sorrows for not having been the wife of the man that I loved, and for not having it in my power to reconcile in this manner both virtue and love. In the state which I am about to embrace, I fear nothing but internal struggles with my inclinations; and if my actions only are to be the subject of apprehension, I devote myself with cheerfulness to the expiation of M. d'Ervin's death.

"M. de Serbellane offers to marry me, and to pass the remainder of his days with me in America. Just Heavens! with what transport should I not embrace the offer! what sentiment, even to idolatry, should I not feel for him! but blood separates us, and death disunites us! a spectre draws back my hand from his, and Hell gapes between us both! If I sink, I shall bring the object of my love into the abyss with me; he, unhappy man! would partake my eternal punishment, nor should I obtain from Providence, no more than from mankind, the wretched consolation of condemning myself alone. My tears, and the sacrifice which I make, will perhaps serve his cause in Heaven.—Yes, cried she, with a voice more elevated, yes—I shall pray incessantly for thee; and if my prayers can move the Supreme Being, my dear friend, thou shalt be saved.—Delphine, said she, embracing me, pardon my distraction. I cannot speak of him without betraying myself, and I confound together the passion of love, and the sentiment which commands me to abjure it for ever. They have told me, that after long exercises of piety and prayer in the temple of God, my ideas would become more calm; and I am inclined to believe these worthy priests, who have addressed to my soul the only language that was adapted to console it.

"It would have been much more embarrassing to me to live, in the midst of the world, after renouncing M. de Serbellane, than to prove to him by the resolution which I take, how deeply my soul is interested in his favour! This motive, I am sensible is not worthy of the august state which I am going to embrace; but ought we not to assist, by every means in our power, the inevitable weakness of our nature? And if I perceive myself possessed of more fortitude, in assuming the mournful robes of death, with the reflection that such a sacrifice will draw still tenderer tears from him; wherefore exclude me from the sentiments which support me in this dreadful conflict of the heart?

"One duty alone, one single duty had sufficient influence

to detain me in the world; that was, the education of my Isore. My dear Delphine, it is you who have made me perfectly easy, with respect to this anxiety; I will deliver my daughter to your care, the daughter of the unhappy man whose death I have been the cause of. You are much more worthy than I am, to form her tender mind and soul; my neglected education will not allow me to contribute, in any respect, to her instruction, and my heart is too full of trouble, to be ever capable of fortifying her mind against the attacks of adversity. She is only ten years of age, and I am twenty-six; the spectacle of my sorrow acts too violently on her tender organs. Alas! my dear Delphine, you are not happy yourself; perhaps I have ruined your destiny for ever; but your mind is more habituated than mine to the practice of reflection, and knows better how to withdraw from the observation of a child, the sentiments which it should continue to be ignorant of. The comprehension of your understanding, and the variety of your knowledge, allow you to entertain yourself, as well as others, with a diversity of ideas. As for me, I live and die through love; such is the sameness and monotony of my fate. In the religion which I now submit to, I conceive nothing plainly, except its influence over the pangs of the heart; and in my weak and poor head there does not enter a single thought, that does not derive its source from love alone.

“Alas! the destination which I have embraced, will certainly afflict M. de Serbellane; perhaps, also, he might have tasted some happiness with me. This bloody hymenial inspired him with no horror, and for some years at least he would not have been troubled by the expectation of another life! Ah! my Delphine, it has cost me a long struggle to give him this uneasiness; it seems to me that a single day's grief of such a man, is more than equivalent to all the tears which I have shed. However, an idea, which pride would have rejected, has consoled me at last for the most overwhelming apprehensions. I am dear to him, it is true, but I love him a thousand times more than he ever loved me. A future career and destination still awaits him; he will never bestow on any woman, I believe, that early tenderness which had me for its object, and which formed my glory, though it cost me the loss of honour and of virtue. Love ends with me, in him; but a powerful and energetic existence may yet inspire him with generous expectations.

“As for myself, my dear Delphine, since an imperious duty separates me from him, what sacrifice do I make, in retiring to take the veil? I have experienced what life is, and have made every discovery from it; and nothing remains for me, but fresh tears to be added to those which I have already shed. Should I have retained my liberty, I could never repulse the

wandering idea, of the possibility of being united with him. Every day I should have to encounter this idea afresh, with every power of my soul; and I should never enjoy any repose.

"Believe me, my dear friend, there are only two asylums on this earth for our sex, that is to say love and religion: if I cannot recline my head in the arms of the man whom I love, I call to my relief another powerful protector, who will be able to support me when I am sinking to the earth, when I am even wishing it to receive me for ever in its bosom.

"I have discovered within this last month, that misery has its resources: I found them in the impressions which I formerly let escape without thinking to collect them, and in the wonders of nature, which I never noticed before: from all these I have derived succours and consolations, which will prepare a happy calm for me in the state I am going to embrace. I shall, in short, have every indulgence in prayer and meditation; and these are the sweetest enjoyments to be found on earth for souls for ever exiled from love.

"Perhaps also, by some special favour, women experience in advance those sentiments which, are, on some future day, to be the lot of the favoured elect of Heaven: but, if I can believe my own heart, they cannot possibly exist in this active, rotationary, busy world: something more exalted, enthusiastic, and supernatural, is absolutely necessary for them, which may elevate their minds into the ethereal regions.

"In the delusion of my heart, I confounded the idea of love and virtue, and this was the only sentiment which could lead to criminality by a natural sense of noble and generous emotions. But how dreadful is it to awake from such fatal and illusive notions! To escape from their captivity, nothing less was necessary, than that I should become the assassin of the man whom I had sworn inviolably to love! Oh! what a tremendous reflection! and how afflicting must have been my despair, did not religion present me with a species of atonement sufficiently ample and efficacious to reconcile me once more with myself.

"This sacrifice is now made, and God has pardoned my crime: I am conscious that he has pardoned me, because I feel the soothing balm of his mercy. My remorse is assuaged, and the pleasing melancholy of soft and tender minds resumes its empire in my heart. By it I still communicate with the Divinity; and if, in another world, my unhappy husband should lose his pride and irritability, if he reads the secrets of the heart, he likewise, I am firmly persuaded, he will feel compassion for my fate."

Theresa, on pronouncing these latter words, ceased to speak, and suppressed the tears which were coming into her eyes. I was deeply affected myself, and collected all the powers of



my mind to combat the design of Theresa : still, in my heart, I must own, I did not disapprove of her plan, though I do not hold the same opinions on religious matters which she is known to entertain. I think, however, I should like that solitary, recluse, and regular life, which must finally subdue all the irregular movements of the heart. I was desirous also of terrifying Theresa, by a description of the endless sorrow she should be condemned to; but she interrupted me suddenly, and would not permit me to proceed.

“Oh! what can you say to me,” cried she, “which he has not already written to me! or what has not my love, more eloquent than he, pleaded in his favour in my heart? Let us speak no more on what is irrevocable,” said she, gently imposing silence on me; “my vows are deposited at the feet of the Almighty; it now remains to proclaim them before mankind. But the everlasting bonds are already closed around me, beyond recovery or redemption.

“I have never told you, that I should be happy; I felt no unhappiness in life, except when I beheld him, and when he spoke to me: his voice alone revived in my heart the animated sensations of existence: but still, I have no farther reason to dread those violent torments of remorse by which the divine vengeance signalizes its tremendous power. Henceforth a stranger to life, I shall behold it gliding along, like the rivulet which runs before us, and whose equable and uniform motion contributes to bestow on us a sort of pleasing tranquillity. The recollection of my singular destiny, perhaps, may trouble for some time my peaceful abode of retirement; but at last, as they assure me, this recollection will become feeble, and the distant murmur of the busy world will be only confusedly heard: it is thus I shall learn to die, and thus I shall sink into final repose, blest by a mild and merciful God, and perhaps still cherished by those who formerly loved me.

“This day I set out for Bordeaux with my brother-in-law,” continued Theresa, “where I shall remain a few months.

“I shall return to you, before I take the veil, in order to bring Isore with me, and transfer to you all my privileges over her. I conjure you, my dear Delphine, let us never abandon ourselves to the illusions of passion; I have been scarce able to restrain my feelings, during my conversation with you this day. You might have seen that Theresa is not yet become insensible, and she will never be so: but I ought to endeavour to appear in that light, in order to receive the full benefit of the resolution which I have adopted. We must command the empire of our hearts, we must not even express the emotions which we feel, and it is thus only they can be totally subdued. We shall then, as they assure me, overpower every passion which religion glories in triumphing over. My

dear Delphine, my generous friend, retain my last accents in your recollection; they are the eternal adieus which precede death; and you will hear no more the voice that issues from the heart. Farewell!" Theresa then quitted me; I followed her not, but continued some time alone, to give vent to my sorrow in tears. I was sensible likewise, that it was not at the moment of her departure, that I could hope to make any impression on her, and I expected more effect from my letters during her absence. When I returned into the house, M. d'Ervin's brother-in-law had arrived; and Theresa was making preparations for her journey with a surprising firmness. Isore wept bitterly on taking leave of me, and Mademoiselle d'Ervin, on going down to her carriage, turned away her eyes several times, that she might not witness the affliction of the little innocent. Theresa got into her carriage without saying a word to me; but on taking her hand, I perceived, by its trembling agitation, what painful sensations of grief she must have felt.

Theresa! thou tender and gentle being, (as I repeated several times to myself after her departure) will this strength, which you do not derive from yourself, support you for any length of time? Will not the sentiments of religion be gradually cooled in your breast—the exalted sentiments of a religion which subsists on credulity and enthusiasm alone? May you not lose, one day, that faith of the heart alone, which blinds you to every other idea? But, alas! I, who think myself more enlightened, know not what is to become of me.—Will not the expectation of a future life, the principles which have been implanted by a Being perfectly good, the ideas of religion, so reasonable and so sensible, will they not restore me to myself? or is love to be subdued by superstitious phantoms only, which fill our minds with horror?—Grief, my dear Louisa, makes every thing doubtful to us, and we are never satisfied with any of our faculties or opinions, when they have not proved a sufficient defence against the afflictions of life.

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## LETTER LXV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, Oct. 14.

I BESEECH you, my dear Louisa, to deliver this note to M. de Clarimin, by which I become security for the sum of sixty thousand livres, which Madame de Vernon owes him: moreover, obtain from him, I conjure you, a promise of ceasing to

calumniate me. He lives on his estate, a few leagues from you, and it will be an easy matter to prevail on him to come and speak to you. As soon as I shall have received your answer, and shall have made Madame de Vernon acquainted with this circumstance, the affairs which detain her here will be finally settled, and we shall set out together for Languedoc; I, for the purpose of rejoining you; and she, to accompany me, and pass the winter in the warm provinces. Her physicians say that her breast is considerably affected; she seems herself to think that she is in danger; but it gives her very little concern. Alas! if I be condemned to lose her, grief will totally deprive me of what little strength I have left.

I did not learn from Madame de Vernon the embarrassed state of her affairs; chance alone brought me acquainted with this circumstance, and I knew it only the day before, when Madame de Mondeville and Madame de Vernon called on me yesterday. I took Madame de Mondeville aside, and asked her, if what I heard about the complaint of M. de Clarimin against her mother was true. "Yes," replied she, "my mother wanted me to engage myself for the sum of sixty thousand livres which she owes him, during the absence of M. de Mondeville; but this I could not comply with, for I have no title to dispose of any thing without the consent of my husband; and my mother does not wish that I should ask his permission to do so. You know I set little value on fortune; but I pride myself on being strict in the performance of my duties." She said true, my dear Louisa, for she is not over and above attached to money; but yet her mother might be at death's door, before she would consent to sacrifice a single idea respecting what appears to her conformable to that propriety of conduct which she endeavours to support.

"I do not conceive," said I to her, rather hastily, "what sense of duty can prevent any one from being serviceable to a mother; but in short——" She interrupted me at these words, rather peevishly; for direct attacks irritate her the more, on this account, that she does not understand those of another description. "You seem to me, cousin," said she, "to have no fixed principles on any point of conduct; and what would become of virtue, if we were to give scope to every sudden impression and emotion?" "And what is virtue," said I, "but a continuation of generous emotions? But let us drop this subject; for it concerns me, and me alone."

Madame de Vernon came up to us, and interrupted our conversation; on seeing her by daylight, I was painfully struck with her emaciated and dejected aspect, and never did I feel a more tender attachment to her! Madame de Mondeville returned to Paris: I kept Madame de Vernon with me; and the following morning, when she rose, I presented her with an or-

der on my banker for sixty thousand livres, and begged her acceptance of it. "No," said she, "it is impossible; it was my daughter's duty, my daughter for whom I have done every thing, to extricate me from my present embarrassment. She has done right, perhaps, in refusing me; I never formed her for my purposes; I committed her education to others, and we can neither understand one another, nor agree together on any subject. But it is not you—no, it is not you, in reality, my dear Delphine, who ought to render me so important a service."—"Why then will you refuse me the happiness of assisting you?" said I. "Two years ago you consented to it; and now, on a sudden, after the marriage of your daughter——" "Ah!" said she, "the marriage of my daughter——" Then, after a sudden pause, she proceeded: "For some time past, I have been unfortunate in every thing. Perhaps I have acted wrong; but, in short, in the state in which I am now, all this will not last long."—"Do not you desire to hinder M. de Clarimin from accusing you?" "I thought he was my friend," said she, with a sigh; "perhaps I only gave myself up to illusions; but this indeed is not a turn of mind I am much inclined to. However, he wishes to ruin me totally in the opinion of the world, and seize on every thing in my possession. It is wrong in him to do so, for I have not long to live; and it is a harsh proceeding in him, to deprive me of that wretched existence to which I have sacrificed every blessing." "In the name of God," said I, with tears in my eyes, "reject these horrible ideas, and do not refuse accepting the service which I request you to avail yourself of. I am in affliction, in cruel affliction, as you know; but do not deprive me of the only satisfaction which I can derive from my useless fortune." "Well, then," said Madame de Vernon, "I believe you to be generous: when I die, whatever may happen after me, you will not repent of doing me this last service. It is not requisite that you should lend me the sum which I owe: your security is sufficient, and I accept it."

There was something sorrowful and gloomy in the accents of Madame de Vernon, which gave me much uneasiness. Poor woman! the injustice of mankind has, perhaps, soured a temper so sweet, and has disturbed a mind naturally so calm. Alas! what mischief do not hard-hearted people cause! I then made some observations to her on her passion for play. "Alas!" replied she, "you know not how difficult a thing it is, to be a woman without fortune, without youth, or children to surround us: we are obliged to try every effort to banish such painful ideas." I did not think proper to insist on the losses she exposed herself to, at the moment when I had done her a service; and I endeavoured to turn the conversation on other subjects.

In the evening a vast deal of company came to see me. It was known, that Madame d'Ervin, for whose sake I said that I would avoid society, was no longer at Bellerive. My announced departure drew many persons to see me, who wished to make me believe that they regretted my departure, and whose good-will is wonderfully revived in my favour, by the idea of my approaching absence.

While the circle was full in the drawing-room at Bellerive, Madame de Lebensei arrived with her husband, whom she had promised to bring to see me. Upon seeing such a numerous company, she seemed entirely disconcerted, and went down into the garden, under the pretext of taking the air. It was impossible for me to detain her; and perhaps it was better that she kept at a distance, for the looks of all the women were already composed for her reception. M. de Lebensei did not retire; I even remarked that he stopped behind intentionally. He wished to find an opportunity of testifying his indifference respecting the malignant arrangements of society. He was in the right; for, under the proscription of opinion, a woman must sink, though a man may rise above it. It seems that, in this respect, the men, having made the laws themselves, are at perfect liberty to interpret them, or spurn their regulations.

I was struck with the good sense of M. de Lebensei: he did not seem to doubt about the cool reception which was destined for his wife; and he spoke on serious subjects with a vast superiority. He addressed himself to nobody but me; and discovered the art of indicating his disdain for the censure of which he was the object, without openly expressing it. An air of unconcern, a calmness of tone, and respectful manners, kept every one in his proper place. He made no alteration, perhaps, in the received opinions of the company; but he forced them to silence, and that is a good deal; for this description of persons raise their estimation by the discretion of their conversation; and a man who compels others to circumspection in his presence, is respected in some degree also during his absence.

When Madame de Lebensei had returned to us, after the departure of the company, M. de Lebensei continued to display that independence of character and opinions which distinguish him from other men; and I could perceive that his conversation, by fortifying my mind, did me real good. Good, did I say? what an uncommon expression have I adopted!— Alas! if you knew the state of my soul— But since I have promised to restrain myself, I must have the resolution to do so, even towards you.

END OF VOL. I.

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# DELPHINE.

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BY

MADAME DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN.

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*Un Homme doit savoir braver l'Opinion ! une Femme s'y soumettre.*

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A Man ought to be able to brave public Opinion ; a Woman should submit to it.  
*Madame Necker's Miscellanies.*

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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PHILADELPHIA :  
E. L. CAREY & A. HART.

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1836.



# DELPHINE.

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## LETTER I.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, October 16.

BEFORE I reunite myself with you for ever, my dear sister, I come to an explanation with you on a subject which I had neglected, but which you explain so clearly in your last letter,\* that I cannot well dispense with answering it. You inform me, that M. de Valorbe has constantly preserved the same sentiments for me; that he has not been able for this year past to quit his mother, who is on the point of death; but that he has constantly written to you, concerning his desire to see me, and his wish to be acceptable to me. You likewise recall to my attention a circumstance which I can never forget; that is, that he had saved the life of M. d'Albemar ten years ago, and that your brother felt the liveliest gratitude towards him. You add, to this enumeration, some eulogiums on the character and understanding of M. de Valorbe: perhaps I cannot be entirely of your opinion on this subject; but that is not the question at present. If you had known Leonce, you would not think it possible that I should become the wife of any other man; and I should be very much hurt, I confess to you, if the obligation which we owe to M. de Valorbe would impose on you a necessity of admitting him often to visit you. I do not imagine, you may believe me, that I shall see Leonce once more in my life; but if he should learn that I permitted any body to be particular with me, he would imagine that I was consoling myself; he would entertain no idea of lamenting my fate, which otherwise he might occasionally do; for all the homage of the world would not recompense me for the compassion of Leonce: but this is enough;—and now, as you know the fears which I entertain, I am persuaded you will endeavour to spare me the repetition of them.

As soon as you shall have informed me whether M. de Clarimin will accept my security, we shall set out. Madame

\* This letter has been suppressed.



de Vernon desires that I should request you to receive her in a friendly manner. My dear sister, I conjure you, do not be unjust towards her: if you cannot overcome the dislike which you express to me in your last letter, be at least moved with the multitude of attentions she has ever shown me; for such kind offices suppose a great share of goodness. Since the departure of Leonce for Spain, I am no longer to be known as the same person. A woman of sense has said, *that the loss of hope made an entire change in the character*. I am now sensible of the truth of this observation; for I once possessed, you know, great gaiety of disposition; I took an interest in every event, and every new idea; and now nothing pleases me, nothing allures me, and I have lost, with my happiness, every thing which made me amiable.

Yet, what a cruel state is this, for a person whose soul was so sensibly alive to all the charms of the mind, and of sensibility! I loved society almost too much; it was often necessary, and always agreeable to me: at present, I can only endure the company of one person, that is, Madame de Vernon. Recompense her, my dear Louisa, by your kindness, for the consolations she has given me.

Never was there such a desire to please, in the midst of intimacy, as in this woman! never was a mind so happily turned for the world, devoted to the consolation of solitary grief! I tell you, sister, and you will experience it yourself, that Madame de Vernon is a lady of the most irresistible charms in society. I have known agreeable and sensible women; and I could easily discover, when they spoke, wherein the charm of their manners consisted; and, had I desired it, I might have become agreeable by the same means: but every word Madame de Vernon says, is unexpected, and you are not able to follow the traces of her mind, either for the purpose of imitation or penetration. If she loves you, she expresses it to you with a sort of negligence which carries conviction to your soul: she seems to be addressing herself, when words full of sense escape from her, and you collect them when she lets them fall.

My life depends on you and Madame de Vernon alone; so I entreat you, not to let me see you disunited! She has become now much more necessary to me than before; the last attachment, in a manner, which I have preserved from the shipwreck of my happiness: but I am not under the necessity of expressing more particulars at present. You will find her, alas! both sick and sorrowful; and your kind heart will be undoubtedly interested in her behalf.

## LETTER II.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Bourdeaux, October 20.

A VIOLENT fever has forced me to remain near a month in this place, a circumstance which I have concealed from my family at Paris. My mother alone has known it, and I wished no other person but her to take any interest about me. On the first day of this fever, I wrote you, I know not what sort of a foolish letter, which contained, I believe, some insulting expressions against Madame d'Albemar; I beg of you to burn it, because I was in a delirium when I wrote it: it is not that I wish to justify Delphine, for the faults of which I accuse her; but to every person but myself, she is, and she ought to be, an angel. If you but knew how they speak of her in this place! yet she only remained here two months; but is not that time sufficient to make them not forget her soon?

I shall endeavour, to-morrow, to have a glimpse of Madame d'Ervins; she wishes to see nobody; she is determined, as they say, to become a nun. She places her daughter with Madame d'Albemar; this child speaks with transport of Delphine: I shall see the child at least, if possible—but is there not a strange appearance of mystery in every circumstance in these affairs?

It appears to me, that in your last letter you are less warm in the praise of Madame d'Albemar: you did wrong to admit any unfavourable impression from what I wrote to you, for I did not mean to make any impression on any person whatsoever. Preserve your admiration for Madame d'Albemar; I should be unhappy to think that I had diminished it. Reports are circulating, concerning Madame d'Ervins, but the thing is impossible: the first time I heard these reports, I started, and since that time they are contradicted, and entirely disbelieved.

Farewell, my dear master! I shall go and see Madame d'Ervins. But how comes it, that this idea agitates me so? She is the friend of Delphine. M. de Serbellane is gone by sea to Tuscany; he did not wish, then, to return to France.—Alas! I know not where I am.

## LETTER III.

## LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Bordeaux, Oct. 22.

DELPHINE! Oh! once beloved Delphine! a child has revealed to me, what the blackest perfidy had found the art of concealing from me. The voice of men had accused you; the voice of a child, that voice of Heaven, has justified you. Hear me, Delphine! this is the most solemn instant of our lives. I am bound for ever, I know it to be so; there is no farther happiness for me; but if I am the only culpable person, and Delphine be innocent, my heart will still have courage enough to suffer.

I went yesterday to see Madame d'Ervin; however irritated I might be, I wished to hear you spoken of by those who love you. Madame d'Ervin being totally given up to the exercises of piety, refused to see me. Isore, her daughter, was playing in the garden, and I went up to her; I was told that she loved you extravagantly. I made her speak about you, and perceived that the impression you produced was already felt, even at that tender age. Shall I tell you the truth? I ventured to question Isore concerning your sentiments. Strange circumstances had oftentimes revived and destroyed my hopes; I accused, sometimes, in a confused and indistinct manner, the artful address of a woman; and I flattered myself that the natural frankness of a child, would baffle the most subtle calculations.

"Madame d'Albemar is to take care of you hereafter," said I to Isore, "and she will certainly bring you to Tuscany."—"To Tuscany! why so?" replied she; "I should be very sorry to go into Italy: it is since my mamma has liked that country so much, that we have been so unhappy." "But," said I, "did not your mother always love Italy? she was born there."—"Oh!" replied Isore, "she quitted it so young, that she remembers nothing of it; but M. de Serbellane has told her every thing." "Do you like M. de Serbellane?" continued I. "I do not dislike him," replied Isore; "but since he has come to see mamma, she has been constantly crying." "Constantly crying!" repeated I, with a lively emotion, "and what did Madame d'Albemar on that occasion?"—"She consoled mamma; she is so very good!" "Oh! undoubtedly she is so," cried I—And in that moment, Delphine, I felt my heart returning to you. "But yet," added I, "she will marry M. de Serbellane!"

"M. de Serbellane!" interrupted Isore, with that vivacity which children manifest when they think themselves in the right—"M. de Serbellane! oh! it is mamma who loves him,

and not Madame d'Albemar; and since mamma wishes to become a nun, she will not marry M. de Serbellane, and certainly Madame d'Albemar will not go to Italy." At these words, Isore's governess took her roughly by the hand, and carried her away, giving her at the same time a severe reprimand. I did not foresee that I should induce this child to do injury to her mother's character; but what is the meaning of the expression which she has mentioned to me? Should it be Madame d'Ervin's who loved M. de Serbellane, should it be to save her, that you assumed in the eyes of the world the appearance of every evil imputation; in this case, I should consider you a sublime creature, instead of accusing you of perfidy: and as for myself, I should desire—— No, I should not have deserved every thing that I have suffered.

But still how can I believe it to be so? Have I not a letter from you, which Madame de Vernon delivered to me, in which you refer me to what she shall communicate to me on your part? Did she not observe silence? was she not embarrassed, like a friend in confusion for your culpable conduct towards me, when I questioned her on the circumstances which I had learned on my arrival at Paris, and which were made public on the occasion of M. d'Ervin's death? These details, each of which caused me a fresh pang of grief, were your attachment for M. de Serbellane, your engagements entered into at Bourdeaux with him; the scruple and hesitation which my regard for you excited in your mind, the delicacy which brought you back to your first love, the obligation you were under to follow M. de Serbellane after he had fought a duel for you, and when he was forbidden to reside in France. Did not you tell me yourself, that he was gone, when you knew the contrary to be the case? Was he not shut up in your house four-and-twenty hours with you?—— Oh! I feel again, in writing these words, all the emotions which I thought were calmed! Did not M. de Serbellane, in the very instant when he had killed M. d'Ervin, make mention of your name? Did not your servants refer to you alone to appear in a court of justice? Did not you go to fetch away M. de Serbellane's portrait? Did you not frequently receive letters from him? Have you denied to any person—that you were to marry him? Have you not demanded a safe-conduct for him? But even on the supposition that such a conduct as this was a continual sacrifice to friendship, you must be considered as very imprudent, and I must be very unhappy; yet still you would not have ceased to love me, and it would still be some satisfaction to me to live.

If you have not been culpable, if Madame de Vernon knew the truth, and you had charged her to tell it to me, never have falsehood and treachery employed more infamous, artful, and complicated stratagems! I shall be avenged, if her cold in-

sensible heart be susceptible of a wound, if——But it is not her destiny that now employs my thoughts.

Who will ever be able to comprehend this evil genius that has disposed of my destiny? Madame de Vernon sent me a letter from my mother, conjuring me to keep the promise which she had made, of my marrying Matilda: she spoke in terms of reproach of you. On any other occasion, nothing she could have said would have made any impression on me, but then I fancied her voice was prophetic, and that it announced to me the event that annihilated all my hopes. My mother conjured me, as I valued her peace of mind, to fulfil her promise: it seems, my duty towards her was not, of itself, sufficient to doom me to the misery I have undergone; it was moreover requisite that Madame de Vernon should lay hold on my temper and disposition, with a degree of dexterity which I did not then apprehend, but which afterwards, on recollection, inspired me with excessive alarm.

There is not one frailty in my character, which she did not endeavour to irritate. She pleaded your cause with warmth, and wounded me to the quick by her manner of justifying your conduct. She exaggerated your indiscretion, in passing for the cause of the duel between M. d'Ervin's and M. de Serbellane, and thereby injuring your reputation in the opinion of the world. At the same time, she proposed to engage you, on the score of my despair, to bestow on me your hand; and in this she shocked my feelings and my pride! As far as I can recollect her words at this time, it is possible she may not have exactly told me that you loved M. de Serbellane; but she employed, if possible, more *finesse* to make me think so, than was necessary for her to tell the fact itself. I experienced, while I listened to her, a strange convulsive symptom; my forehead was covered with sweat; I took long strides across her chamber; I withdrew from her, and approached her again, devouring her words, and dreading their effect. My soul was wearied with this conversation, as by a series of bitter sensations, a long life of misery; and yet this fatigue did not exhaust my agitation, but only rendered my emotions still more painful.

This woman, I know not by what secret power, managed my passions as she would an instrument, whose motions she could regulate at pleasure. Every thought that shocked me, she presented to my imagination; every word that wounded my feelings, she incessantly repeated; yet it was not against her that I was irritated. It always appeared to me, that she wished to console me, and that the pangs which I felt were occasioned only by truths that escaped from her, or which she could not succeed in concealing from me.

She sought eagerly for every topic that might excite my natural irritability, on every matter that relates to honour and

opinion, in order to convince me, without expressly declaring it to me, that I should be dishonoured, if I showed any farther attachment for a woman who was publicly known to have been in the power of another man, or if I only appeared indifferent to the scandal caused by the death of M. d'Ervin. What she said might equally be applied to faults of levity, (if I had imagined you capable of such faults only,) or to errors of opinion; but I seized on every hint that might alarm my jealousy. Madame de Vernon made me what she liked, not by the influence of my affections, but by exciting all the cruel emotions which resentment may inspire. What art! if indeed it be art.

I have still but a confused idea of every circumstance; but is it not possible, that the most generous virtues, and the vilest crimes were combined together to ruin me? Delphine, if the hope which I embrace shall have deceived me; if the child has not spoken the truth, do not answer me; I shall understand your silence, and I shall relapse into the state from which I had, for a moment, emerged. What signifies a letter from your own hand? How is it to be understood? How comprehend, likewise, all the mysteries of that fatal day, of the days that preceded it, and the days that followed it. Ah! I conjure you, conceal nothing from me! Secrecy, in this case, is truly calamitous!

Even since my marriage, since what will shortly be five months, it is strange that Madame de Vernon should still persist in making use of her fatal knowledge of my character, to irritate my jealousy by my pride, my pride by my jealousy, and to lacerate me at once by all the good and bad qualities of my soul. Delphine, the heart of Leonce is still the same—if yours has not been guilty, call to mind when you reposed in confidence on him—alas! alas! since that time a fatal tie—contrived by the most odious treachery and falsehood—Do not, however, be alarmed for Madame de Vernon, nor her daughter; but let not a fatal goodness once more inspire you to sacrifice me to your anxiety for others!

It was my wish, after having seen Isore, to return at that very instant to Paris; but I received a letter from my mother, who was uneasy about my stay at Bourdeaux, and thought me to be very ill, by which I learned that, notwithstanding the unfavourable state of her health, she was desirous of setting out to meet me on the road. It is my duty to anticipate her, and therefore I depart. If it be you whose image shall preside over my life, I set out to perform those duties to a mother, which you would recommend on an occasion of this nature. If I am doomed to lose you, it is in Spain that the ashes of my father repose, and it is there my determination shall be to die.

Reflect, my Delphine, with what sensations I shall pass the

days which separate me from your answer. I shall be at Madrid the 1st of November; if you are at Bellerive, my letter may be kept back for some days. I shall wait till the 25th, or during a month, and I have fixed this term for my hope. Until the 25th, my anxiety will be certainly very cruel; but why need I describe it to you? It only imposes one duty on you, which is truth.

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## LETTER IV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, October 26.

My dear Louisa, what a letter have I not just received from Leonce! Every thing is revealed, every thing is cleared up; Madame de Vernon! even you yourself would never have imagined she could be capable of it! She has profited by all the pretexts which my confidence had provided her with, to induce Leonce to believe that I was in love with M. de Serbellane, that I admitted him into my house, and detained him four-and-twenty hours; and that I was going to set out, in order to marry him. Just heavens! you may imagine that I am thinking on myself only, and that I shall feel a secret joy in learning that Leonce loves me still! No—I only feel one pang; I have but one thought, and that is betrayed friendship, the most tender friendship and the most faithful. We secretly flatter ourselves, that time will produce changes in our sentiments of affection; but every arrangement must rest on the foundation which is formed by certainty and mutual confidence. My dear friend, if you should deceive me, do you imagine that I could support so dreadful a misfortune? Yet, I loved Madame de Vernon as much as I do you, perhaps still more. I accuse myself for my facility, and I feel the deepest humiliation on this circumstance; but her seducing influence maintained an inconceivable sway over me. I have had some moments of doubt respecting her, since Leonce's marriage; but she triumphed over them all, and my heart was more devoted to her than ever.

I am now in tremor and agitation, and violently affected, as if Leonce was the sole cause of my trouble. Alas! after devoting so many cares, so many services, and so many years, to acquire a friendship for the remainder of our days, what a painful recollection to behold, all this time, and all this assiduity lost, and vanished for ever! Whom shall I ever find, whom I have loved from my infancy with so much confidence and candour? Should I wish to make another friend after Madame de Vernon, I should scrutinize and examine her, I should be susceptible of anxiety and suspicion; but Sophia—

I loved her at a period of my life, in which I was so tender and so true! I can no longer make an offer of a heart which surrendered itself without reserve, and the first impressions of which had Madame de Vernon for their object. I shall love where I am loved, I shall be grateful for the marks of attention which shall be bestowed on me; but this lively tenderness, this involuntary and artless sympathy, which was inspired by charms that were new to me, I shall never again experience. I regret Sophia and myself; for I shall never be to any other person what I have been to her alone.

Is it possible that she could accept so many proofs of friendship, if she felt no sympathy for me, nor loved me with a lasting affection for life? Of all human vices, is not ingratitude the hardest, that which supposes the most callous soul, the greatest oblivion of past favour, and of that time, the recollection of which affects so deeply souls endowed with sensibility? As for myself, must I preserve no traces of the past, which she has betrayed? If I give way to my love, if I confirm the suspicions of Leonce, shall I not mortally irritate him against the mother of his wife? I know his violence, and his generous indignation; he will forbid Matilda to see her mother. I do not wish to ruin Madame de Vernon, from the respect I feel for former sentiments, and I wish to honour in her the friendship with which she had inspired me. But to continue guilty in Leonce's eyes, is a sacrifice entirely out of my reach! What am I then to do, or what is to become of me? I shall write to M. Barton, and request him to open Leonce's eyes, and moderate the effects of his first emotions of resentment.

What then! must I refuse myself the happiness of writing this simple line:—*Delphine has never loved any one except Leonce.*

He hopes for this simple avowal, and he expects it; alas! what a cruel perplexity! I am now going to Madame de Vernon's, and I shall speak to her on the subject: I shall not spare her feelings, if they are not yet extinct. You shall know, when I finish this letter, what she will say to me: but what can she say? I am determined, that for once, at least, she shall hear bitter complaints, which she can never call to mind hereafter without blushing for her conduct.

Midnight.

No—it is beyond my power to conceive, what is become of the idea I had formed of Madame de Vernon's character. I have this moment quitted her, after a conversation of two hours, during which, I was not able to extort a single word from her, that bore any resemblance to that natural and amiable sensibility which I so often discovered in her before. Perhaps, when she found her real character unveiled, she thought it no longer expedient to have recourse to dissimulation; and



if she had before exhibited herself to me in the same light as she did this day, my heart would never have been deceived in her.

After receiving Leonce's letter, after giving myself up, in writing to you, to all the soft and painful impressions which it revived in my breast, I went to Madame de Vernon's for the purpose of an explanation. I need not describe to you, with what oppression of heart I proceeded on that road, and entered into that house, which yesterday I considered to be more my property than my own dwelling. The aspect of places which never vary, though our hearts may change, produces a painful and sorrowful sensation, when viewed with sentiments of a very opposite nature from the original impressions of pleasure and happiness. I stopped, however, in Madame de Vernon's ante-chamber, to make some inquiries about her, before I entered her apartments. If she was confined through illness, I was determined to return without seeing her. I was told that she was much better, and that she had slept till noon: I then advanced with a quick pace, and opened her door somewhat in a violent and hasty manner. She was alone, and came up to me with that air of warmth and attachment, which had so often charmed me. I was provoked at her duplicity, and, with a violent motion, I flung on the table, before her, Leonce's letter and desired her to read it.

She took the letter, and, at first sight of it, reddened in a very remarkable manner; but prolonging designedly the time of its perusal, for the purpose of recovering from her surprise and confusion; and when she felt herself perfectly calm and unruffled, she said to me with great coolness: "It is in your power to sow quarrels and hatred in a united family; but it would be more reasonable in you to consider, that it was but right that I should employ every effort in my power to marry my daughter to the best advantage, and to prevent you from depriving her of a husband that had been promised to her."—"Oh!" cried I, "was it just that you should abuse my friendship, and the boundless confidence which I placed in you?"—"And you," interrupted she, "did not you abuse my hospitality, in coming every day to my house, to steal Leonce's affection from my daughter?"—"Did I ever conceal any thing from you?" replied I with warmth; "did I not even commission you to explain my conduct and sentiments to Leonce?"—"In reality," interrupted Madame de Vernon, "if you will permit me to use the expression, you must have been very simple, to select me to engage Leonce to marry you."—"Very simple!" repeated I, with indignation; "very simple! and do you, madam, make a mockery of generous sentiments? I call Heaven to witness! at the very moment in which I learn that my esteem for your character has totally destroyed the happiness of my life, that I still enjoy the con-

scious reflection of being so easy a dupe to your artifice; I enjoy with pride the possession of a mind incapable of detecting perfidy, and which you cruelly played with, and turned to your advantage, as you would the unsuspecting simplicity of a child."

"Leonce himself confesses," replied she, "that it was not I who acquainted him with the general report of the world concerning you; I satisfied myself with not denying the circumstance; which was the least that could be done in my situation. With regard to the pretended power which I maintained over Leonce, whatever he may say on that subject, it is evident he only means to make a sort of apology to you: it is impossible to govern any one without a perfect knowledge of their character. He was displeased with the noise occasioned by the accident at your house, with the imprudence of your conduct, and the independence of your opinions; and all these circumstances were very repugnant to the general turn of his sentiments: and this is the whole of your pretended grievance." "No," replied I, suddenly, "it is not the whole of my grievances: you endeavour, by trifling expressions, to confound good and evil together, and conceal your actions under a veil of words: employ with a crafty world such base arms, but not against me; a bleeding heart is proof against such artifices. Meditate on every word in Leonce's letter.

I then offered to take back the letter, and read it over again; but Madame de Vernon kept it in her hands, and said to me, in an unconcerned manner: "Do you wish to occupy all Paris with our family quarrels, and show to all your friends this letter from Leonce?" On pronouncing these words, she threw the letter in the fire. This action enraged me; but the more violent my sensations were, the more I endeavoured to repress them; and I rose to depart. Madame de Vernon, upon this, renewed the conversation on a sudden, as she did not wish it to terminate with the extraordinary action which she had taken the liberty to commit. "I once had some friendship for you," said she to me; "but the interest of my daughter must have been naturally nearer to my heart." "What then!" replied I, "did I not pay a proper regard to her interest, when I made over the estate of Audely's to her, and when I preserved you twice from ruin?" "Delphine, (interrupted Madame d'Albemar,) "there is nothing that betrays so great a want of delicacy, as reproaching people with the services rendered to them." "You know better than any other person, madam," continued I coldly, "how little value I fix on the services I can do for others, when it has fallen in my way to benefit essentially persons whom I did not love: I never preserved the slightest recollection of such favours; but it was with confidence and tender attachment, that I devoted myself for your benefit: the proofs of friendship which I have given you, were addressed to those sentiments of sympathy

with which I thought I had inspired you; and if you felt nothing that answers this description, why did you command my friendly exertions in your behalf? Why did you expose yourself to the most humiliating, the most cruel of all reproaches, that of ingratitude?"

"Ingratitude!" cried Madame de Vernon: "that is a word of mighty import, which is generally much abused: people serve each other when they feel a mutual esteem; and when they lose their regard for each other, the mutual interchange of favours ceases. Nothing is done in this world, unless in the spirit of calculation, or through a peculiar bias or inclination: and in either case, I do not know why such stress should be laid on the sentiment of gratitude." "I disdain to answer such wretched sophistry," said I; "but really, had you no friendship for me, when you made me such a display of interest and affection? did not my attachment to you, affect your heart? Is it then true, that for six years our conversations, our letters, our intimacy, and every thing, was nothing but cruel dissimulation on your part? In retracing the happy years which I have passed with you, I feel an insupportable affliction, that I cannot flatter myself, that any period existed in which you loved me sincerely: when, therefore, did you begin to deceive me? Tell me, I conjure you, so that at least I may preserve some pleasing recollections of the days which preceded this unhappy epoch." While I was speaking thus, I was bathed in tears, and I felt no small pain in endeavouring to restrain them. Madame de Vernon appeared to me to preserve the greatest coolness and self-command: however, when she resumed the subject, her voice was somewhat altered.

"All is over between you and me," said she: "such is your temper and disposition, that you will listen to reason on no subject: your speculations are too lofty, to enable you to comprehend the realities of life. If I die of the complaint which threatens my existence, perhaps I may explain my conduct to you; but as long as I shall live, it behoves me to support my existence, and my manner of living in this world, such as it is. I wish also to avoid the painful sensations which your presence, and the scenes of grief which attend it, never fail to bring with them; and of course it is better for us to see each other no more." Shall I tell you, my dear Louisa, that I shudder at these last words: I was determined to have no farther connexion with Madame de Vernon, I was sensible that I could not bring myself to repeat reproaches of this nature, and that it would be impossible for me to see her without frequent provocations to renew them. But still, I was not prepared to end every intercourse with her on this day; and the rapidity of her decisions, however inevitable it might have been, alarmed me a little. "What!" said I, "cannot you find some excuse, that may weaken my resentment? The illusion

of what I was on your account is destroyed," said Madame de Vernon; "and I am too proud to attempt to revive it." "Too proud," cried I, "you who have contrived to deceive me!" "Have done with these reproaches," replied she impatiently; "I am perhaps of more intrinsic merit than I appear to be. Whatever may be the case, I do not like to hear the bad opinion expressed which people entertain of me. You have the power," added she, "of making the few days of life which remain to me, most grievously unfortunate, by revealing every thing to Leonce: you are at liberty to make use of this power: I shall make no attempt to persuade you to a contrary resolution."

"Alas!" cried I, "you know not yet what influence you may possess over me, if repentance—" "Repentance!" interrupted she, with an ironical accent, "that's an idea very much after your taste!" On this reply, and the air that attended it, I recovered my indignation, and advanced towards the door, in order to depart: but stopping suddenly, I cast my eyes on that apartment where I had passed so many agreeable hours, and reflected that I was now on the point of leaving it, never to enter it again.

"Alas!" said I, in a mild manner, "how little have you known the path that leads to true happiness! You met, in the middle of your journey, a young and innocent person who felt for you the first dawn of friendship, a feeling full as tender as the first sentiment of love; a person who was extremely charmed with your mind and manners, and who entertained not the least doubt respecting the morality of your character. You know, that in my circle, I often heard your reputation slandered, but I always endeavoured to justify you; and in doing so, I felt more attached to the good qualities I attributed to you, than if I had never been under the necessity of defending your conduct. You have broken the heart which was devoted to you, though such a cruel instance of ingratitude was not necessary for your interest. You might have commanded the sacrifice of my happiness for my attachment to you, and you have deceived me by your habitual dissimulation, when truth and sincerity might have answered the same purpose. You wished to insnare by falsehood what generous friendship would voluntarily have offered. Nevertheless I desire—I ardently desire that you may still be happy; but I forewarn you, that you will never be loved, as I have proved to you, that it is possible to love. Such tender unions are never formed twice; and however amiable you may be, you will never again experience the friendship, the devotion, and the deluded affection of Delphine. I now quit you for the last time, never to behold you again, and it is I who am affected; I alone! Will you not even attempt to soften the sentiment of sorrow, which I carry with me? Is your talent for

dissimulation, which you have made so cruel a use of, deficient only when it might make our last moments less afflicting?" "I can say nothing to you," said she, "I can say nothing to console you; I must only remove from myself every painful sentiment, and not think of renewing connexions, which henceforth must give birth only to unpleasant sensations. It is no longer in your power to forbear to disturb my repose; farewell therefore: it is repose I seek, if I am to live any longer; if not"——She then paused, as if intending to say something more to me; but, changing her resolution, "Adieu, Delphine," said she to me with a hasty accent, and returned into her closet.

I remained for some time immoveable on that spot; but at last, being ashamed of my emotion, and of that weakness of heart, which had entirely changed our respective situations, and converted her who had been so mortally offended into an humble suppliant to her persecutor; I quitted the house for ever, and returned home, impatient to acquaint you with what had passed. If some degree of maternal tenderness had not been intermingled with your affection for me, if you had not inspired me with sentiments approaching to the nature of filial fondness, and if the premature death of my parents had not transferred my dutiful attachment to you, I should have experienced some difficulty in describing to you the pangs which I felt from my rupture with Madame de Vernon; but your heart is not accessible, even to the noblest of all jealousies. You feel indulgent towards your child; you pardon her for that lively friendship, which was inspired by her early taste for refined accomplishments, and the first pleasure of society: this fatal friendship, existed in conjunction with the most impassioned love; nor did it prejudice, in the slightest degree, that grateful tenderness which I shall ever feel for you alone.

In the mean time, what resolution must I adopt? From my conversation with Madame de Vernon, I could perceive, that she was extremely alarmed for the quiet of her family, in case Leonce should learn the truth; but what regard do I owe to Madame de Vernon? and yet what power on earth can obtain my consent to come to a second misunderstanding with Leonce? What need I mention power? there is only one to dread, and that is the voice of my own heart! and is it true that my heart demands the sacrifice? No—but I must likewise set some value on my own destiny, and my goodness of heart must excite in me some compassion for myself. I have still time to consult M. Barton and have his answer; yours too may reach me, and a fortnight is necessary for letters to come from Madrid; Leonce will wait till the 25th of November, without condemning me for my silence. Ah! my dear sister, what will you write to me? In the struggle which tears my heart, to what sentiment will you incline?

## LETTER V.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, November 2, 1793.

I WAIT impatiently for your answer, and that of M. Barton; I count all the days, and shudder at their approach. I consume the hours in reflections, which combat and destroy each other, and keep my heart in constant agitation. Sometimes I find a pleasure in reflecting, that if Leonce's jealousy had not been alarmed, no other cause of dislike would have alienated him from me, so far as to become the husband of Matilda: and in an instant afterwards, I give myself up to despair, from the consideration that the most simple accident might clear up every shadow of doubt and difficulty, and that if I had had the courage to go to him, perhaps, even at the last moment, a word, a single word, would have made the most wretched of women, at once the most happy!

What will be his sentiments, when he comes to know my innocence! Yes, most undoubtedly, he shall know it; I shall never be compelled to surrender my right of justifying myself to him. But still, what disorder and trouble am I not going to introduce in his domestic duties, if I make a full and candid avowal of the truth! Is it not better, that time and my own conduct should enlighten him by degrees? But if I continue silent, he announces that he shall consider me criminal; and he will imagine, that I was deceiving him, at the moment when I appeared to love him. It must not be so—this idea is intolerable to me: if I was on the point of death, should I not obtain the privilege of having every thing revealed after my decease? Alas! should I obtain it even then! The happiness of others ought to be sacred to us, as long as it can depend upon our will.

Cruel woman! it is on your account, I suffer this frightful uncertainty; it is your repose, which still struggles in my heart, against an inexpressible desire! and will not Matilda likewise suffer, for what I must reveal? Must I write to Leonce, and acquaint him with circumstances that will make him hate his mother-in-law, and alienate him still more from his wife? Alas! never, never was any person in such a situation, in such a dilemma, when either resolution appears impossible.

In short, I must come to some determination; let me only wait for the counsels that may instruct me how to proceed.

My journey into your part of the world is inevitably retarded for a few days, because I cannot now set out with Madame de Vernon. I had placed all my affairs in the hands of a man

employed by her, and every thing must be separated, after imagining that every thing was to have been in common between us both for life. I am ashamed to confess to you, how weak I have been. This morning again, I got into my carriage, to proceed to my notary's; but, as it was necessary, in order to arrive at his house, that I should pass before Madame de Vernon's door, I had no longer the resolution to proceed. I pulled the string of my carriage, in the middle of the street, and gave orders to drive back to my house. I was desirous of arranging my papers before my departure; and I found in every corner letters and notes from Madame de Vernon. It was farther necessary to order her picture out of my drawing-room, and send her a multitude of books which she had lent me. Such incidents as these, are more cruel than taking leave of our friends in the hour of our death; for the affections, which even then subsist, spread around some consolation on our last conceptions; but in a rupture of this nature, every detail of separation is tormenting, there is nothing soft or affecting in our ideas, nor any sensation of pleasure intermingled with our tears. I have no longer any person to consult on the daily occurrences of life, and I feel myself unsettled in every respect. I reflect, with some degree of satisfaction, that, through delicacy for Madame de Vernon, I had kept at a distance from some ladies who expressed friendship for me; for I did not wish to confide to any other person, the sentiments I communicated to her, and with respect to her, I was even jealous of myself.

In the midst of these reflections, a thousand times more mild than such a guilty friend ought to expect, Madame de Lebensei found out the secret, yesterday, of making me speak very bitterly of Madame de Vernon. Madame de Lebensei had come expressly from the country to question me; Madame de Vernon had seen her, and found the means of winning her over completely, either by the charms of her manner, or, because, in the situation of Madame de Lebensei, people are cautious of quarrelling with any body, and become, with little difficulty, favourably inclined to all who treat them well.

I thought it bad of Madame de Vernon, to communicate, without my consent, to Madame de Lebensei, the secret of my attachment to Leonce; but the defence which she set up, and which Madame de Lebensei rather awkwardly reported to me, irritated me much more. She grounded her apology on the supposed inclinations of Leonce, on his little regard for women who did not respect the general opinion of the world, the irresolution of his plans respecting me, and the little similarity that existed in our turn of thinking. Madame de Vernon, in fine, as Madame de Lebensei told me, represented herself as having no consideration in view but the welfare, and, perhaps, the inclinations of Leonce. Her employing these pretexts, served only to exasperate me more, and pierce me to the very heart.

If, in fact, any person had a due sense of Madame de Vernon's injurious treatment of me, perhaps I would myself have softened the expressions of my resentment, and endeavoured to let the blow fall on her as lightly as possible! But the blunt deportment of Madame de Lebensei, her evident prepossessions, the expressions she let drop, which plainly proved to me, that Madame de Vernon had given her reason to think that I was provoked to the highest degree of resentment; all this show of impartiality, when the question lay between generosity and perfidy, offended me so much, that I lost, I believe, all moderation; and, having described to Madame de Lebensei, with much warmth, my whole conduct, and that of Madame de Vernon, I declared to her, that I would not listen to any person who should speak in her favour; and I begged her only to relate to Madame de Vernon every thing that I had said, and in the very terms and expressions that I had used.

When Madame de Lebensei was gone, I perceived that I had acted wrong. I did not repent of having excited the resentment of Madame de Vernon, nor of having attached Madame de Lebensei more warmly to her interest. It is a sensation not altogether disagreeable to hurt ourselves, by attacking a person who was once dear to us; we delight in breaking through every restraint and consideration of interest, under the domineering sway of revengeful emotions; but still I repented of having forced my natural feelings, and given scope to injurious expressions, when my sentiments and actions were not in unison with my words. I was moreover, I acknowledge, exceedingly provoked against Madame de Vernon, when I learned that she was still seeking to injure me, and even at the very moment in which I was balancing with myself whether I should not sacrifice all the happiness of my life to her repose.

However, what will become of me, as long as Leonce shall suspect me? Time and solitude will not alleviate this feeling: it will revive every day, for every day I shall reason with myself, and prove that I ought to reply to Leonce. But why imagine that my conscience forbids me? Ah! let me hope that you and M. Barton, will agree in your opinion, that Leonce will be calm, and that he will have virtue enough to listen to the truth, without punishing the culprit: ah! did he but know how to pardon, I then might acquaint him with the whole truth!

P. S. You have not answered me on the subject of M. de Clarimin's business: I am assured, that you think with me, in attaching more importance than ever to this business, and prevailing on him to accept my security. If, by accident, you have not yet offered it, the events which have taken place will, I am convinced, suggest to you the propriety of despatch.



## LETTER VI.

MADemoisELLE D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, November 4.

My dear Delphine, my beloved pupil, on what a strange world have you fallen? How comes it that Madame de Vernon, that perfidious woman, whom my poor brother detested with so much reason, has captivated you by her seductive arts? Why have I not been able to combine with my affection for you, those amiable talents which delight your imagination? You would then feel the want of no other attachment, and your heart would never have been deceived.

You ask my advice on the conduct which you ought to adopt with respect to Leonce? How shall I venture to give you any counsel? I am of opinion, that you should not, in any sense, sacrifice yourself for the base Madame de Vernon; but when Leonce comes to know, that you have never ceased to love him, will he be able to endure Matilda? Can he bring himself to a resolution never to see you again? Will you have the power to refuse to see him? Moreover, with every means of justification in your power, must you assume the air of the criminal? Must such anxiety and indignity be supported? No:—friendship must never aspire to dictate acts of heroism; if you reply to Leonce, if you acquaint him with the truth, you will, perhaps, do nothing essentially bad, nothing which any rational person would take the liberty to condemn; but if, in order to secure his domestic repose; if, in order to prevent him from pursuing you, you shall continue silent, you will surpass, by many degrees, whatever might have been expected from the severest virtue.

## LETTER VII.

M. BARTON TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Mondeville, December 6.

SOME days have elapsed, my dear madam, before I could determine myself to write to you: the counsel which I intended to give, appeared to me too painful for you to follow; and yet I am resolved to furnish you with the greatest proof of my esteem, by replying with an impartial frankness, to the generous question which you condescend to ask me.

M. de Mondeville having been basely deceived with regard to your sentiments, has married Mademoiselle de Vernon; he

has neglected the happiness which I hoped would be his lot, he has ruined his comfort in life, but still he must pay some regard to the duties imposed upon him by his state: he will continue to experience, at least, a tolerable condition of existence, as long as he shall not have forfeited his own esteem. Without being able to divine the secret so admirably conducted, of which you have been the victim, I could never bring myself to believe that you were capable of deceiving; but I always avoided coming to an explanation with Leonce upon this subject. I have received a letter from him, two days before yours, in which he acquaints me, that he has written to you, and that he has requested of you to reveal to him, what he at length begins to see through, the criminal artifices of Madame de Vernon. He contains himself with you, he tells me; but through his confidence in me, he expresses himself with such fury, that I shudder for the consequences, when he comes to the knowledge of Madame de Vernon's criminal conduct towards him.

His first resolution is to forbid Madame de Mondeville to see her mother, and, in case of her disobedience, he means, to separate from her. He forms, moreover, a thousand other extravagant projects of revenge against Madame de Vernon. I am persuaded, that he will renounce every design unworthy of his character; but such as I know him to be, I am sure he will pursue the plan which he announces; that is, to oblige Madame de Mondeville to break with her mother; yet, from this circumstance alone, what trouble will not result?

However guilty Madame de Vernon may be, yet you would pity her, if she were condemned never to see her daughter again; and if, as I have reason to think, Madame de Mondeville will consider it her duty to refuse compliance, what scandal will not arise from the separation of Leonce and his wife, from such a cause as this! It is you alone, madam, who may be the guardian angel of this family,—the guardian angel even of her who has so cruelly persecuted you.

I shall not presume to dictate to you, the conduct which you ought to adopt on this occasion; it was my duty only to acquaint you with the disposition and sentiments of Leonce. It is impossible, when once he knows the truth, to flatter ourselves with the idea of appeasing his resentment; he is, unfortunately, very violent in his temper; and never, must we allow, never was any man injured to such a degree in his love, and in his character.

You will be able to judge yourself, madam, what it may be expedient to conceal from Leonce, you will judge what sacrifices your generous soul may be capable of making! I do not request you to pardon me, for I think I may honour you by my sincerity; as, indeed, you deserve to be honoured, and my respectful admiration adds much force to this expression.

P. BARTON.

## LETTER VIII.

DELPHINE IN REPLY TO M. BARTON.

Paris, November 8.

You do not imagine what uneasiness your letter has given me! I flattered myself that I might be allowed to undeceive him, and that I had reached the happy moment of recovering his esteem. You have pointed out my duty to me, my true duty, which has for its end, to spare the sufferings of others: I recognise it, I submit, and shall not write. Permit me, however, to tell you, that for the first time in my life I felt myself raised to the elevation of virtue: yes, so great a sacrifice is certainly virtue, and the price that it costs me, deserves the suffrage of the virtuous man, and the compassion of Heaven.

He expects my answer on an appointed day, on the 25th November. My silence, he says, he will consider an acknowledgment of the perfidy of which I have been accused. Can you not, therefore, write him word, that this silence is a mystery, which I can never explain, but which cannot furnish him with any decisive information? Can you not, at least, tell him that I am departing for Languedoc, from which I shall never again remove? Is this too much? and do not I defeat, by weakness after weakness, the merit of the action which I termed generous?

I leave to your discretion, what you will think proper to say; you are sensible how much I suffer, and what I shall always suffer, as long as he considers me culpable. If Heaven inspires you with the means of relieving me without prejudice to the welfare of others, I am persuaded you will embrace the offer: if I must be sacrificed, I surrender myself to you, and shall esteem you, for your faithful disposal of my destiny. I deposite in your hands, my promise to keep at a distance, to avoid writing, to take no liberty for my own sake, but only to ask you sometimes, if you have softened, in Leonce's heart, the just aversion which, for the second time, he is on the point of feeling for me.

## LETTER IX.

MADAME D'ARTENAS TO DELPHINE.

Paris, November 10.

I CALLED at your house yesterday, my dear Delphine, but to no purpose; your door is always shut. I am obliged to set

out for my estate in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau ; but I cannot forbear inquiring from you the causes of an incident, which employs the attention of every company in Paris. You have quarrelled with Madame de Vernon, and you see each other no longer : I am well inclined to believe that she is in the wrong, and of course, that you are in the right. But why quarrel at all with her, or with any body else ? It may be attended with very serious consequences.

You have discovered at last, that she had deceived you ; had I been in your place, I should have had my suspicions of her a long time ago ; but it is precisely because she is of a dexterous, dissembling character, that you ought to have endeavoured to keep on some terms with her. Your conduct has been the reverse of what it ought to be ; you ought not to have loved her with so much blindness before your discovery, nor to break with her afterwards with so much violence. Madame de Vernon has been established at Paris a long time before you ; she has a greater number of relations there ; and you know, that relations in this city always support the cause of each other ; not from any affection, but because they consider it a duty to defend the cause of their kindred. There is so little of true friendship in the world, that it is still more reasonable to rely on the assistance of those who consider themselves bound to defend you, than on those who undertake your cause from a voluntary impulse only. You must find yourself inevitably on bad terms with your family, if you will not consent to see Madame de Vernon ; as Madame de Mondeville, on this supposition, will certainly not separate from her mother. Notwithstanding all this, we must strive to reconcile you together : think of the matter as I think of it ; but be on good terms with Madame de Vernon, and without any degree of distrust or deceit.

Men are at liberty to quarrel as they like ; a dashing duel answers every purpose for them. Such is the magic character of courage, that it escapes with honour from the bonds and links of society ; those links which are of the finest and most flexible formation, and yet the most difficult to break. A young woman without a father, and without a husband, however distinguished she may be in other respects, has neither any real weight, or any marked and settled rank in the midst of society. You must, therefore, extricate yourself dexterously from every critical situation ; govern good sentiments with more scrupulosity than bad ; renounce that romantic sublimity, which is only calculated for solitude ; and guard, especially, against that thoughtless vivacity, the most engaging of all graces in conversation, but the most dangerous of qualities in point of conduct.

You love, whatever you may say to the contrary, the bustle and variety of society at Paris : learn, therefore, to maintain

your rank in that society, without furnishing pretexts to your prejudice to any person. Before the troubles which you have lately met with, you loved likewise, and so you have reason to do, the unexampled success which attended you wherever you were seen or heard. Be diffident of such success; and let it make you much more prudent: for, by exciting envy, it obliges you to fear such persons as Madame de Vernon. For my own part, I could easily quarrel with her; we are both well matched, old and forgotten as I am; but as for you, the most beautiful, the most youthful, and the most charming of women, the world will easily believe what Madame de Vernon will say about you; and, in order to conceal nothing from you, I must tell you, the world already believes it.

I began my letter with the intention of concealing from you, what Madame de Vernon advances in her own favour; but on farther consideration, I think it reasonable, that you should be acquainted with all the grounds upon which you are to direct your conduct. She gives out, that you had prevailed on her to engage Leonce to marry you, that after the disastrous duel with M. de Serbellane, he would not listen to such a proposal; and that, in consequence of your disappointment, you never would pardon her for her fruitless negotiation. She affirms, moreover, that you had circulated horrid calumnies against, and had reproached her with pretended services with much indelicacy and harshness. I leave you to judge how much the ungrateful, and all who wish for an opportunity to be so, are offended at the mention of services which have been rendered to their associates in ingratitude! In short, she assures the world, that it is herself who has come to the resolution of seeing you no more, because you came to her house, only for the purpose of insnaring the affections of the husband of her own daughter, and this latter charge has rallied all the devotees on her side of the question. You see, that she knows equally well, how to conciliate the good and the bad, and what is more, that numerous class of peaceful indifferents, who having heard much more said about Madame d'Albemar than Madame de Vernon, think it suitable to their dignity, as modest and moderate personages, to condemn her who has made most noise in the world.

You must not exaggerate, however, the effect of Madame de Vernon's slanderous language: we are in a state to protect you from her attacks; but it is indispensable, that you should begin by coming to an accommodation with her, and I'll answer for it, that she desires nothing more; because, in every dispute of this nature, before the tribunal of opinion, each party is in secret dread of the other, and both are desirous of an accommodation. Let me advise you then, to return to her suppers, cease to reproach her any more, and say nothing to her prejudice. If she then continues to injure and molest you, I take

the charge of your defence upon myself, and pledge my promise to you, to play her some tricks of old woman's warfare. I am well acquainted with Madame de Vernon's stratagems, though without making use of such myself; I know enough of them to be able to unmask them, and I am persuaded, she will endeavour to appease you, when she discovers that your fine and brilliant accomplishments are under the protection of my prudence and reserve. Adieu, my dear Delphine, follow my counsels, and every thing will go on well.

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## LETTER X.

DELPHINE TO MADAME D'ARTENAS.

Paris, November 14.

I AM much affected, my dear madam, with the lively interest you take in my concerns, but I cannot follow the advice you have the goodness to give me. I once loved Madame de Vernon tenderly; and how is it possible for me to renew my attachment to her, from motives of personal interest and convenience only? It is a species of conduct I am little capable of, even towards indifferent persons; and I should feel an invincible repugnance to degrade the sentiments which I have cherished, by subjecting them to cold calculations of casual convenience. How could I, in the ordinary intercourse of the world, behold with indifference a person who had been the object of my warmest friendship, and who has shown herself my bitterest enemy? No—Society is not worth the price it would cost, by inflicting such torturing violence on our natural character, and struggles so repugnant would do more than derange the true emotions of the heart, they would finally complete its utter depravation.

I must acknowledge to you, that I am exceedingly hurt by the slanderous insinuations of Madame de Vernon; but it is precisely because her tales are listened to, that I am resolved never to come near her. I should have been, perhaps, weak enough to desire to do so, if what I think reasonable only had occurred, that is, if she alone was generally blamed; but since she accuses me, and is supported in her charges, since I have still some cause of apprehension from her, it is my fixed resolution never to see her again.

At present, my dear madam, I wish to justify myself to you alone. As Madame de Vernon has reproached me *with speaking ill of her*, and you advise me to *keep still on terms with her*, I confess I am rather surprised at the expressions, when

applied to an attachment of that nature which I felt for Madame de Vernon! Once only have I spoken of her with harshness, in addressing myself to a person whom she esteemed considerably, and by doing so I only contributed to increase her attachment to Madame de Vernon, by the warmth of expression natural to an injured person. You certainly do not love Madame de Vernon, and yet I restrict myself from speaking to you about her; you, whom I so passionately desire to be enlightened on the absurd calumnies which have been circulated against me.

I have reproached Madame de Vernon with the services I have rendered her; and *every service whatsoever*, she says, is *obliterated by reproaches*. You see plainly, my dear madam, what an easy matter it would be, in this manner, to get rid, at once, of every sentiment of gratitude. We might wound the hearts of the most generous friends and benefactors; and on their complaining of our conduct, the natural reply would be, that *every act of generosity was done away by words*. This is not the case, however, between me and Madame de Vernon; if I have reproached her with ingratitude, it is the ingratitude of the heart only I accuse her of; and by confounding together, and placing in the same line, the day on which I pressed her hand with tenderness, and that on which I would willingly have parted with half of my fortune for her sake, she has compelled me, for my justification, to have recourse to my privilege of bringing to her recollection every former proof and instance of my attachment.

I blush deeply for other charges which she brings against me; but were I to combat them, I should then be truly culpable. I should then really injure Madame de Vernon, and till now you see I have only found out the secret of injuring myself alone, and I applaud myself for the discovery. I am determined not to *keep on terms* with Madame de Vernon, on the motives which you mention: I do not wish to disarm her, but still I should fear to do her prejudice; alas! she will soon discover to what a point I have carried my fears!

My complaints against her, when I do indulge them, are all marked with romantic sensibility, which you well know, will not associate the world of Paris in my resentment. I am not indifferent to the censures of that world; but I shall not do, in order to escape from them, what I should do for the satisfaction of my own conscience. Truth ought to acquire us the suffrages of others, or teach us how to do without them.

I should perhaps fix more value on opinion, if I was united with the destiny of a man who should be dear to me; but being condemned to live alone, and to support my destiny in solitude, I feel no interest in my defence. Who would enjoy my triumph, were I to be successful? And is it not wise, to forbear to struggle against the malice and mischief of mankind, since

the only fruit we derive from our exertions, is only a little grief the less? This indifference respecting what may be said to my prejudice is now more easy to me, as I am resolved to leave Paris. I am going to shut myself up for ever in retirement with my sister-in-law; I shall carry thither the tenderest recollection of your goodness, and my regret for not being blessed with a longer enjoyment of it.

DELPHINE D'ALBEMAR.

## LETTER XL

REPLY OF MADAME D'ARTENAS TO DELPHINE.

Fontainbleau, Nov. 19.

You feel too acutely, my dear Delphine, the momentary troubles of life! What sentiments of candour, magnanimity, and goodness, in your letter! But still what impressions of your youth! I do not recollect, to confess the truth, to have had so much sincerity at your age; and yet I am not, thank God, either wicked or treacherous; but I have lived in the busy world, and am completely undeceived as to the pleasure of being a dupe.

Whatever may happen, I do not mean to require of you what would be too repugnant to your character, and we shall arrive at the same end by a negative conduct. In the world of Paris, that which is not done, is always as important as that which might be done. You must not pass your whole life in Languedoc, but you may remain there for six months. During this time every circumstance will be forgotten. You have been received with transport on your first arrival at Paris: it is now the turn of envy; when you come back, they will be tired even of envy, and curious to see you again; and as nothing that could be said will have left any trace behind it, it will no longer be kept in memory. It is not for such trivial causes, that reputation is irrevocably lost; and if you had experienced this misfortune, however unjust it would be, your philosophy could never surmount it, nor escape the sharp and pointed shafts of calumny. This, however, is not the question. I pledge myself to repair, this winter, every slander that Monsieur de Serbellane's duel gave birth to, and every addition that Madame de Vernon may have made to it.

All I request of you is, to stop a little at my place in the country, which is on the road that leads to Montpellier. My niece, to whom you have been so good, and whom you have made so reasonable, earnestly requests your compliance with our wishes; and I take the liberty to add my authority to her request.



## LETTER XII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Fontainebleau, Nov. 25.

I HAVE already travelled twenty leagues on my way towards you, my dear Louisa; my journey has commenced, and I have left Paris behind me:—I shall never more behold the place where I first knew Leonce: I have left it on the very day when, filled with remembrance of me, he expects, at the distance of two hundred leagues, the answer which was to justify my conduct—and this answer I have not sent! Ah! why do I not feel from, so great a sacrifice, that repose which may be naturally expected from the satisfaction of my conscience?—Alas! the pangs of love suppress all the pleasing emotions that attend on a satisfactory performance of our duties, and happiness sinks even when virtue supports it in the struggle.—However, it is not for our sole advantage, that so many noble faculties have been bestowed upon us; it is to second the intention of the Supreme Being, by avoiding evil, and by doing good on earth to every creature of his creation.

I felt the loss of M. de Lebensei on quitting Paris; I had seen him on every day that preceded my departure: he seemed to apprehend that my last conversation with his wife might have produced a coolness between me and her, and was eager to bring about an accommodation. I promised to keep up a correspondence with him, for he is a man of so comprehensive an understanding, and has reflected so profoundly on the different emotions and sentiments of the human mind, that perhaps he may calm my troubled heart, by accustoming me to consider life under a more general point of view.

Madame d'Artenas has invited me to pass a week with her on her estate, which is agreeably situated in the middle of Fontainebleau Forest; and I have yielded to her entreaties, and particularly to those of her niece, Madame de R. She has, with the utmost delicacy, avoided seeking my company at Paris, and she seems to consider it a favour if I stay with her; I shall, therefore, suspend the continuation of my journey for another week. Madame de Mondeville came to see me one evening at Paris, when I was at Bellerive; I returned her visit the following morning, but not without being assured beforehand that she was not to be at home. I was apprehensive of meeting her mother; and I had just reason to dread the emotion I should experience, if I can judge from what I felt from an accidental sight of her, once before, since our final separation.

I left Paris this morning in my carriage, provided for the journey, and drawn by post horses: the postillions, at a turn, drove violently against a chariot with two horses; and being alarmed at the circumstance, I looked out, to see whether it might not be overturned. I perceived, in this chariot, Madame de Vernon alone, with her head reclining on the chariot side. I know not whether it was fancy or reality, but I thought she was very pale and emaciated, and I shrieked with surprise when I saw her pass. She looked at me with an air of tenderness and melancholy; and, shall I own it to you? an involuntary movement impelled my hand to pull the cord of the carriage; but there was not any cord, and the horses had already carried me a hundred paces from her. I perceived from this experience, and by the sensation which I felt the remainder of the day, how prudent I had been in avoiding any farther interviews with Madame de Vernon.

The recollection of a long and tender friendship is apt to revive, on the representation if its object being involved in sufferings and misfortunes: but I know that Madame de Vernon feels no regret for me, nor any loss from my absence; and therefore I leave her, without the least doubt of her indifference with respect to me.

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## LETTER XIII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Fontainebleau, Nov. 27.

ALAS! my dear Louisa, how little prepared was I for the incident, which compels me to return instantaneously to Paris! The unhappy Madame de Vernon! I feel no longer any traces of my resentment against her—I even reproach myself—I know not what to say—but I shall feel very unhappy for having quarrelled with her, if I cannot see her once more, to pay every attention to her, and prove that I have forgotten all. I fear to lose a single moment, even with you, my dear Louisa:—I send you Madame de Mondeville's letter, and I depart.

*Madame de Mondeville to Madame d'Albemar.*

Paris, Nov. 26.

"I have to announce to you, my dear cousin, a cruel misfortune! This night my mother has been seized with a vomiting of blood, which has not stopped for several hours, and which the physicians believe to be mortal. Her breast having been

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already much affected, for some months past, by her late hours, the present accident is supposed to be incurable, and her danger seems to be very near at hand.

“She was totally senseless towards the close of last night; and on her recovery, she put some questions to her physician, and having formed a true idea of her situation, she said to him, with an air of calmness and composure: “I feel a pressing necessity, sir, for a respite of three or four days, to arrange my different concerns: give me some remedies that may support me for that time; it matters little, as you perceive, whether they be adapted to the nature of my malady, or not—that is settled, and is out of the reach of recovery. But I request of you, to let me know what must be done, in order to preserve a little strength for me till the last moment, and I shall be extremely grateful for your service.” She then turned towards me, and said:—“It is for the purpose of seeing Madame d’Albemar, that I wish to live a few days more. I met her yesterday morning on the road to Montpellier; and I think that a courier may reach her—send one in an instant: I know her heart. I am persuaded she will not hesitate to return; tell her only my present state and my request.—I believe with my mother, my dear cousin, that you are too good to hesitate to comply with the wishes of a dying woman, even though (what I was always desirous of being ignorant of) you may have reason to complain of her. You have not a moment to lose, to give her the satisfaction of seeing you again, and to contribute to the salvation of her soul: for I have no doubt, notwithstanding our difference of opinion, that you will concur with me in the propriety of engaging her to fulfil the sacred duties on which our future happiness depends. This is the first concern I wish to speak to you on, as you can make a greater impression on her than I, if you second my expostulations with her: you do not wish, I am convinced, that my poor mother should die without the benefit of the consolations of religion. I am returning to her now, and expect you with impatience. Had it not been for my reliance on God, I do not know how I could bear this otherwise insupportable affliction. Farewell, my dear cousin: I have this moment requested prayers to be offered up in our convent for my mother; I have succeeded in obtaining them, and shall join them in my fervent devotions. I hope that you will make your own efficacious, by uniting with me in the pious efforts which are prescribed by the religion which we profess.”

## LETTER XIV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Nov. 29.

SHE is still alive, my dear Louisa, and that is all that I am able to say. I entertain no hopes; and never shall I feel a greater necessity for them. I am now united again with Madame de Vernon, by sentiments which are not exactly similar to those of former times; but compassion makes them equally tender. Why cannot I prolong her days? If she should finally recover, she would correct her faults, because she would be enlightened by her errors. But, alas! it seems that Nature gives no lesson so terrible as the last, and will not allow those sentiments to be made subservient to the purposes of life, which are inspired only by the near approach of death.

I have now an opportunity to write to you, while Madame de Vernon is endeavouring to get a little rest. She has been expressly forbidden to speak, a circumstance which obliges me to forego my attendance on her. In the mean time, your feelings will be powerfully interested by the narrative of her conduct on this fatal occasion: you will also, I believe, be struck with the singular letter which she has written to me. I send it to you, and beg you will preserve it. Alas! how unaccountable are the intricacies of the human heart! Moralists are for ever meditating on our passions and characters, and every day some fresh discovery is made which had escaped their observations, and of the effects of which, neither the soul, nor the reasoning faculty, had ever been apprized.

I arrived yesterday at Madame de Vernon's; and, on entering her apartments, I felt a combination of all kinds of emotions mingled together! embarrassment mingled with the most profound pity; a real concern connected with uncertainty in regard to the demonstrations which propriety required me to make. I had learned from the courier, that Madame de Vernon was a little better, but still in great danger. I went up the stairs, trembling, and Madame de Mondeville came to meet me: "My mother has been very impatient to see you," said she to me; "she has been writing to you all day yesterday, although this occupation has been forbidden by her physicians. She has arranged all her affairs. Come, and you will find her more interesting than ever she has been before; but to the present moment I have not been able to bring myself to acquaint her that she is so dangerously ill as to require the attendance of a confessor. The physicians say, that it would be prejudicial to her, to be alarmed respecting her present state; but who, good Heavens! would have the assurance to

spare the body, at the expense of the immortal soul? I must warn you, that I shall put her in mind of this subject, if you do not take it on yourself." "Wait a moment, for God's sake," replied I to Madame de Mondeville, "till I converse a little with your mother."

Matilda conducted me to the unhappy woman:—the room was darkened; and, through the gloomy glimpse of light that appeared, I perceived Madame de Vernon reclined on a couch, with her hair loose and disordered: she was dressed in white, and covered with a deadly paleness. She perceived the emotion which I felt, and said to me: "Compose yourself, my dear Delphine; it is not good for you to be so much affected." I took her hand, and kissed it tenderly: she made me a sign to sit down, and then put to me some indifferent questions about my journey, the place where the courier came up with me, and about the health of Madame d'Artenas, &c. I replied to every thing in monosyllables, not having courage to begin to speak to her about her condition, and suffering nevertheless cruel uneasiness in being forced to take a part in a conversation so foreign to the sentiments which engrossed my mind. Her daughter rose, and left us alone: I thought she was going to speak to me with confidence; but she continued to avoid it, and made me acquainted with the particulars of her accident, and its probable consequences; the certainty of her death in three or four days; and all with a simplicity and composure entirely in her usual style and manner; that manner which, whether in seriousness or pleasantry, was irresistibly combined with grace and dignity.

She took up her handkerchief while she was speaking to me, and having applied it to her mouth, replaced it on the table without interrupting her discourse. I saw it covered with blood: I started at the sight, and, reclining my head upon her hand, I burst into tears, calling her several times by the name which I loved to give her—"Sophia, my dear Sophia!" "Generous Delphine!" said she, "you love me still! ah! that's more sweetly soothing to me than life itself. I have written to you," added she, "in order to avoid a conversation which must have been painful to us both. My letter contains every thing I could say; and I have not pretended to justify my proceedings, but to explain my conduct, from a due consideration of my character and disposition. You will not, perhaps, entertain a more favourable opinion of my habitual sentiments, after this explanation; but you will perceive more clearly that they are conformable to human nature: and when I trace the secret causes of apparent wrongs and injuries, you will be a little more indulgent in your censure of them. The immediate favour which I request is, that, when you have read the letter, you will not converse with me on its contents. I have always been apprehensive of violent emotions, and I have

not reliance enough on my strength, to abandon myself to my own sensations, or those of others. Repentance only is proper for my present situation, yet I am unwilling to submit to it: I am better in every respect when I moderate myself, for excess of any kind is very injurious to me. Write me only two lines, which shall tell me, that you still retain a pleasing recollection of our former friendship; and I shall place these two lines upon my breast, already mortally affected; and this remedy will contribute to let me die without a pang." On saying these words, she rung the bell, being as it were apprehensive about my tears and lamentations, and dreading the prolongation of her emotions.

Her women entered, and she gently desired me to retire to my apartment. I went up to a room, which was provided for me, that I might not be under the necessity of quitting the house, and read with heart-felt anguish the letter which is now before you.

*Madame de Vernon to Madame d'Albemar.*

"DURING the whole course of my life, I have been loved by you alone, though many persons have sought my company, and were delighted with some amiable qualities which I seemed to possess. But you are the only person who has done me real service, without any views of personal interest, without any other design than to second the sentiments of your generosity and friendship. Notwithstanding this, you are that being in the world, to whom I have done the most serious injuries, perhaps you are the only one who has a well-grounded privilege to reproach me with injustice. How then can I explain to you, or even to myself, the grounds and causes of such criminal conduct? The least I can do, will be to reject the gaudy gloss of colouring, and confine myself to the plain simplicity of truth, now for the first time in my life. It is to your understanding only, I shall address this faithful picture of my character; and I shall not make an evil use of my situation, to obtain my pardon for the sympathy it may inspire you with.

"The circumstances which influenced my education have altered my natural disposition: it was originally soft and pliable, and capable, I should imagine, of a happier direction. Nobody took any care of my infancy, when it would have been very easy to form my heart to confidence and affection. My father and mother had died before I was three years old, and they who brought me up deserved no attachment from me. A very distant and indifferent relation was appointed my guardian: he provided me with masters of every description, without giving himself the least concern about my health, or moral qualities. His intentions, I believe, were good; but as his

heart did not instruct him, his conduct was directed by accidental recollection, or the occasional bias of temper or inclination: he looked, moreover, on women, as playthings in their infancy; and in their youth as mistresses, with greater or less degrees of beauty, and from whom we are to expect nothing reasonable, either in sentiment or conduct.

"I quickly perceived, that the sentiments which I occasionally expressed, were turned into ridicule, and any approaches to sense were silenced and suppressed as foreign to the female character. I therefore kept to myself every sensation that I experienced; I thereby acquired an early habit of dissimulation, and extinguished the sensibility which nature gave me. In the general effort which I made to restrain all my passions, pride alone escaped my vigilance; and when I was surprised in a falsehood, I assigned no motive for it, and, disdainingly to attempt an apology, I continued silent; but still I could not help considering it unjust, that they who looked on women as insignificant creatures, who allowed them no privilege, and scarce any faculties, that they, I say, should be so unreasonable as to exact from them the virtues of fortitude and independence, of frankness and sincerity.

"My guardian being heartily tired of me, because I had no fortune, came to me one morning, and told me I must marry M. de Vernon. I had only seen him, for the first time, the day before, and had conceived a decided aversion for him; I gave myself to the only spontaneous emotion I had ever displayed through my life, and resisted with violence the resolutions of my guardian. He threatened to shut me up for the rest of my days in a convent, if I presumed to reject M. de Vernon; and, as I possessed nothing in the world, I had no hopes of extricating myself from his despotic authority. I took a calm survey of my own situation. I saw that I was without power, and that a useless struggle was nothing but a childish conduct; I therefore complied, but with a strong sentiment of hatred for the world for not taking my part, and for leaving me no resource but in dissimulation alone. From this period, I fully determined to have recourse to it, whenever I should deem it expedient. I was firmly of opinion, that the condition of women condemned them to falsehood; I confirmed myself still more in the idea I had conceived in my infancy, that I was doomed by my sex, and by my want of fortune, to be a miserable slave, who was at liberty to use every stratagem with her tyrannical master. I made no reflections on morality, because I did not believe that its maxims were applied in behalf of the oppressed. The secret whispers of conscience I did not venture to suppress, and in reality, till the day that I deceived you, I had nothing to reproach myself with on that head.

"M. de Vernon was not, like my guardian, a cold, insensible

character, but, above every thing else, he was in continual dread of being governed; and at the same time, he had so strong a tendency to be duped, that he naturally presented a temptation to deceive him. It was a matter of little difficulty to dupe him; and he had such a repugnance to the most innocent truth, that, in order to speak with sincerity to a man like him, a certain sort of romantic chivalric character was requisite. For fifteen years, I was indebted for all my pleasures to a habit I had acquired of concealing my taste and inclinations; and I concluded, by reducing, as it were, this art into a regular system, considering it as the only means of defence which women can employ against the injustice of their masters.

"I employed so much address to engage M. de Vernon to pass some years at Paris, that he imagined that he settled there in opposition to my inclinations. I loved luxury, and I know nobody who, from taste, fancy, and prodigality, required a larger fortune than myself. M. de Vernon had grown rich by economy: I found means, however, to excite his vanity so skilfully, that, a little before his death, he was almost ruined, and had contracted, as you know, a considerable debt with Leonce's family. I completely managed M. de Vernon, and yet he always treated me with much harshness: he entertained no suspicion of my influence on his actions; but, in order to prove better to himself that he was master, he constantly spoke to me with rudeness.

"My pride revolted often in secret at the endless stratagems I was compelled to have recourse to, to mitigate the severity of my servitude; but had I separated from M. de Vernon, I should have relapsed into poverty; and I was convinced, that of all humiliations, the most painful to support in the midst of society, is the want of fortune, and the disgraceful dependence which this deprivation carries in its train. Although handsome and lively, I did not wish to encourage lovers; I dreaded the empire of love; I was sensible that love and perpetual dissimulation were things incompatible: I had, moreover, acquired such a fixed habit of constraint, that no affection could take root in my heart, without my voluntary concurrence. I had a strong sense of the inconveniences of gallantry; and, not being conscious to myself of those accomplishments which allow or excuse the errors of sensibility, I determined on keeping inviolate the natural means of character and consideration at Paris. I think that nobody understands better than I do, the full value of this consideration, and the elements of which it is composed; but are the connexions of love, at least such as are formed in the general intercourse of the world, are they of more value than the former? I doubt it, and deny it strongly.

"I conceived at first, the idea of bringing up my daughter



according to my own ideas, and of inspiring her with my own character; but I felt a sort of disgust in attempting to form another person to the art of dissimulation. I experienced some repugnance to give lectures on my doctrine; my daughter, in her infancy, had shown me much attachment, and I was unwilling to let her into the secret of my character, or teach her to deceive. But I was then convinced, and am so still, that women being the victims of every institution of society, are devoted to misfortune, if they once abandon themselves to their sentiments, if they lose, in any sense, their empire over themselves. After mature reflection, I resolved on giving Matilda, whose character, as I have told you before, discovered at an early period a great share of asperity, the restraint of the Catholic religion; and I applauded my ingenuity, in having discovered a method of submitting my daughter to all the bonds of female servitude, without altering the natural frankness of her character.

“You may see from this declaration, that I was not in love with my own habitual character, although I was convinced, that I could not well do without it.

“M. de Vernon died: the state of his affairs made it impossible for me to continue at Paris. I was dreadfully afflicted with this circumstance, for I love society, or, to speak more correctly, I do not like solitude. I had never accustomed myself to any occupation, and my imagination is too feeble to furnish me with any amusement in retirement, or any variety from the resources of my own ideas. I love company; I love play, &c. I like all kinds of external bustle, but the idea of internal agitation is odious to me; I am incapable of animated enjoyments, and for this very reason, I hate pain and trouble, and I have always avoided them with constant care, and an unshaken resolution.

“I took an excursion to Montpellier, and then I first became acquainted with you; it is now six years since; you were then sixteen, and I was near forty. M. d'Albemar, who had the care of your infancy, was destined to marry you the following year, although he was already at the advanced age of sixty: this match was extremely displeasing to me, for it deprived me of every hope of obtaining any part of the inheritance of M. d'Albemar, and thus putting a period to my pecuniary embarrassment, a circumstance which I dreadfully detest. I felt a considerable dislike to you at first; but I call you to witness, and I have a right to be believed, after so many painful declarations, that you appeared to me extremely amiable, and for the three years I staid at Montpellier, I found in your conversation an inexhaustible source of pleasure.

“However, my heart was no longer accessible to sentiments strong enough to make an alteration in my habits. In order to be loved by a person like you, it was necessary to conceal

from you my real character; and I studied yours, in order to adapt my own in appearance to it. This disguise, though intended only to please you, entirely vitiated the charm of our friendship. Your husband died. I had told you, that I desired to finish the education of my daughter at Paris; you made me an offer immediately to attend me thither, and to lend me forty thousand livres, which were necessary for my establishment in that city. I accepted the favour, and that was the first circumstance that tended to deprave my sentiments of attachment to you.

“You were then so young, and so full of spirits, that I actually considered you the most amusing and agreeable companion in the world, and from that moment I formed a plan of making you serviceable to me, and with this consideration, I scrupulously scrutinized your character.

“I soon perceived that you were totally governed by your fine qualities, your goodness, generosity, and confidence, as others are by their passions; and that it was almost as difficult for you to resist your virtuous, and perhaps indiscreet tendencies, as it was for others to combat their vices. The independence of your opinions, the romantic turn of your thoughts and actions, appeared to me in contrast with that circle of society, in which your inclinations, your success, your rank and riches must have placed you. I foresaw, without difficulty, that your attractions and advantages would naturally inspire sentiments of passion, but would at the same time make you many enemies; and in the struggle you were destined to undergo between envy and love, I thought I could easily have acquired a great ascendancy over you. I had then, I solemnly declare to you, no other intention than employing my influence; to procure our mutual happiness. But the passion you inspired Leonce with, totally changed my disposition. It was an object I had much at heart, to unite him in marriage with my daughter, and I explained to you, at a proper time, all my motives for wishing this event to take place: my motives were of such a nature, that even your generosity could not diminish their influence on my condition. I could not, without this match, be dispensed with from giving an account of M. de Vernon's fortune; nor could I settle my daughter according to her reasonable expectations, nor keep up my own establishment at Paris.

“There were some of my debts which I did not own to you, among others, that to M. de Clarimin; I imagined that I might be sure of his silence. I was far from thinking him capable of such conduct as he had adopted with respect to me. I had known him from my infancy; he is the only man that has deceived me, because, on every occasion, he had exhibited himself to me as a person of no morals, and I thought, of course, that he concealed nothing from me. In spite of my usual pru-

dence, I sent him once an angry letter,\* which has offended him. One of the inconveniences attending the habit of dissimulation is this, that a single fault can destroy the fruit of the greatest efforts; whereas the natural character carries within itself the means of defence and justification, and the fictitious one may be for awhile supported; but, when once it falls, never can be raised again.

"I was much displeas'd with you, for wishing to take Leonce from my daughter, after we had agreed together on the subject of this match. If I had spoken frankly to you, you would undoubtedly have justified yourself, but I have a particular aversion to explanations. Being decid'd never to discover to any person my entire thoughts, I detest the moments when every thing must be said: I therefore kept up my resentment against you, and it only became more bitter by being confin'd within my breast.

"On the day of M. d'Ervin's death, in the moment of the catastrophe of this fatal history, when I had prepar'd every thing to oppose your marriage, you show'd so much confidence in me; that I was ready to confess to you, the secret plans which were then in agitation; but this was an impulse so contrary to my nature and habits, that I felt, through my whole frame, a sort of rugged reluctance to an attempt of that description. A thousand accidents concurr'd in forwarding my plans; a letter from Leonce's mother, who, in the most solemn manner, oppos'd his marriage with you, arriv'd the day before that on which I was to speak to him. The public was convinc'd that it was M. de Serbellane's love for you, that had so violently irritat'd him at an injurious expression, which M. d'Ervin's had address'd to you. What you wrote to Leonce was vague enough to countenance any thing that might have been insinuat'd, or conceal'd; and the care you manifest'd to save Madame d'Ervin's reputation, necessarily compromis'd you in the public opinion. I saw myself surround'd with fatal facilities for my purpose, which succeed'd in producing a fatal struggle between interest and honour.

"I remain'd still in a state of uncertainty, I solemnly declar'd to you, and twice I order'd my horses to be got ready to go to Bellerive. At length Matilda, in a conversation which we had together, on the morning of Leonce's return, told me that she lov'd him, and that the happiness of her life depend'd on her marriage with Leonce. I was then decid'd: I consider'd, that by giving Matilda hopes of becoming the wife of Leonce, by bringing into her presence every day a young man so remarkably accomplish'd, I had contract'd an obligation to unite her to him, and that I was only acquittin' myself of the duty of a mother, in employin' every possible means to determine Leonce to marry her.

\* This letter has not been found. •

“To this consideration, I added an opinion, which will be inexcusable in your eyes, but of which I still entertain a deep conviction, which is, that the character of Leonce is not calculated to make you happy. I know that he has some fine qualities; in which you resemble each other, but I have observed him closely, even during that conversation, by which I have merited all my misery for betraying your confidence; it was not jealousy alone, which operated on him; I exerted a mighty influence over the emotions of his soul, by declaring to him, that the opinion of the world was against you, and that he would be exposed to censure for seeking an alliance with a woman who had so publicly committed herself. Every time that I appealed to this circumstance, in order to bring him to a final decision, I brought a blush into his face, and an agitation which would not have been calmed, had he ever learned that appearances alone were against you.

“You are now acquainted, not with my excuse, but with the explanation of my conduct. My greatest guilt was extorting from Leonce his consent, and dragging him to church before you had time to see each other. For this, I have been well punished; the result for me has been nothing but trouble on account of this unhappy marriage; my daughter has removed from me, and she has never been willing to follow my directions. I have given myself up to an anxiety and concern, which suspend the restless agitation of my soul; I have engaged at play; I have kept late hours: I was sensible that by such conduct, I was abridging my days, but the idea was not very uncomfortable to me. I dreaded every instant, that chance might bring about an explanation between you and Leonce. If I then exerted myself to prevent it, it was, above all, with the hope of preserving, or even defrauding you of your friendship, which I merited no longer. The marriage, which I was desirous of, was concluded; but it was requisite that the absence of Leonce should allow me time, to engage you to forget him, and perhaps then you would have strengthened yourself by other connexions, which would make you more indifferent respecting the means employed to bring about a rupture between you and M. de Mondeville. During two months, while he deferred the journey which she intended, I knew every thing you were both employed about, in order that I might take the necessary precautions to prevent an explanation, which I mortally dreaded. Your character, and that of Leonce, made this an easy enterprise; you were engaged with M. de Serbellane, on account of Madame d’Erwins, without reflecting that at your age you might have done serious injury to your reputation; and Leonce is not only of a jealous character, but is likewise very susceptible with regard to the errors a woman may commit with regard to himself, or those she may be exposed to in the eyes of others; from which it is easy to take advantage of him, even against a woman he might love. At length, Leonce

set out for Spain; you proposed to me to go with you to Montpellier; and, thinking myself certain, as Leonce was absent, of being able to preserve your friendship, I returned to you, from my heart and soul, with the most lively tenderness I ever felt for any person whatsoever. When I accepted from you a fresh service, I was worthy to receive it; I entertained more flattering hopes of happiness than I ever had before in my life. My health was recovering; and the hopes of passing the rest of my days with you, revived my sinking soul: it was then that a child discovered that most artful and best concealed secret; and it was the punishment of a woman who thought herself a mighty adept in dissimulation, to be defeated by a child, when she had succeeded in deceiving men.

“This event has killed me; the complaint of which I am going to die, proceeds from the same cause. You have been offended, and with reason, by the manner I conducted myself when every thing was discovered; but as our connexion could subsist no longer, I wished to avoid any painful scenes. The more culpable I felt myself, the more I suffered, and the more I wished to conceal it from you. You might have ruined me in the opinion of Leonce; I did not seek to soften you by submission; I might, it is true, confide in your generosity; but do not spurn the little good that I can say of myself—it is, I declare, because I loved you still, that it was impossible for me to implore your compassion.

“It was not convenient for me, as long as I continued to live in the world, that the real cause of our separation should be known. I found myself engaged to follow the natural bent of my character, and to employ art in my defence; however, this character experienced a great change in the secrets that concerned myself; but after forty years, habits direct us still, although our sentiments may be no longer in unison with them. In order to correct the faults of a whole life, either long reflections, or violent agitations, are necessary; a repentance of a few days can never produce this effect.

“When I met you the day before yesterday, at the moment of your departure, when I was witness to the soft and sensible look you cast on me, I felt an emotion so profound and violent, that it accelerated greatly the end of my life. I wished to have stopped at that instant, to reveal my secrets to you; but the approach of death was requisite to give me confidence to speak of myself. I am timid, notwithstanding the presence of mind which I have always displayed; my character is full of pride, though my conduct has been subtle, and dissembling; there is an indescribable contrast in me, which has often prevented me from indulging the emotions of goodness which I felt at different times.

At length, I am going to die, and all this life of efforts and calculations is already finished; I enjoy these last moments, during which my mind has no peculiar object to attain. I im-

agined, some time ago, that I alone understood what life was, and that all those who spoke to me of devoted attachments and exalted virtues, were either dupes or impostors. Since I have known you, I have had, at intervals, ideas somewhat different: but I do not know, whether my callous system be totally erroneous, and if it be true with every other person besides you, the only reasonable relations are then the relations of interest. Whatever may be said, I do not think that I deserve to be called vicious; I always had a bad opinion of men, and armed myself before-hand against their malicious intentions; but I had no asperity in my nature. I made all my inferiors very happy, and all who were dependent on me; and when I employed dissimulation towards those who had some authority over me, it was only for the purpose of making their lives more happy. I have been unjust towards you, my Delphine, towards you, whom, I repeat it again, I have loved with the utmost tenderness. What unaccountable contradictions! Why did I not yield to the impression you naturally made on me? I resisted it as a sort of folly, as a weakness that counteracted a systematic, political life, like mine, though this sentiment would have equally served my interest and happiness.

"In this letter I have expressed every thing, and I have not exaggerated the motives which might excuse me. I have assigned due weight and rank to my sentiments for my daughter, and my own personal considerations; believe me, then, on the only consideration I have left, believe that I die in loving you. During my life, I have entertained a profound contempt for mankind, and a great share of incredulity on the score of virtue in general, as well as attachment and affection. You are the only person in the world whom I have found at once superior and natural, simple in manners, generous in sacrifices, constant and warm in attachment, sensible as the most accomplished, confidential like the best; in short, a creature so good, and so tender, that, notwithstanding so many unbecoming declarations, it is on you that I rely to shed some tears upon my tomb, and to preserve some faint recollection of me, connected with tenderness and compassion.

"SOPHIA DE VERNON."

What an extraordinary letter is that which you have now read, my dear Louisa! Does it not increase your pity for the unhappy Sophia! What a cold, constrained life has she not led! What shame, and what sorrow is not the result of habitual dissimulation! How can I inspire her with any of those sentiments, which alone can support us in the last stage of life! Oh! I pardon her from my heart; but I wish that her soul may repose on the ideas that may elevate it to her God. I am now returning to her, and shall write to you to-morrow.

## LETTER XV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, November 31.

MADAME de Vernon has been this day truly sublime: the more her danger increases, the more elevated she feels her soul. Alas! might she live still longer, she would display, I am certain, an example of every virtue, for the remainder of her life. Her daughter, who staid up with her the night before, came to my apartment this morning, and told me that her mother was worse than on the preceding day, and that there was no farther reason for hope. "It is absolutely necessary," added she, "that you should speak to her about the necessity of submitting to the duties of her religion. I conjure you to have the courage to do so: it will have the more weight with her, with your opinions, than with mine; and you will spare me the most cruel of all misfortunes, in saving my poor mother from the perdition that threatens her. My confessor is in the house: he is a priest of exemplary devotion; he prays for us in my apartment; and has already said mass, in order to obtain from Heaven, that my mother may die in the bosom of our holy church; but what avail his prayers, unless my mother's are united with them? My dear cousin, persuade her; whatever reply she may make, I am determined to speak to her, it is my duty: but if she was well prepared; if she knew that a person so philosophical—I do not say so to offend you, you may be assured; but I think, if she knew that a woman of the world, like you, was of opinion that she should conform to the duties of her religion, perhaps she would not be restrained by the false vanity which hardens her resolution. I conjure you, my dear cousin,—" and she too pressed my hand with a degree of earnestness, which I had never seen her manifest on any former occasion.

I repeated to her my promise, that I would speak to Madame de Vernon on this subject. In fact, I thought it due to that respect which ought to be shown to ceremonies of a religion generally professed. It had ever been my opinion, that even the groundless scruples of those to whom we are attached merit some consideration. I therefore entreated Matilda to conduct herself with all the mildness in her power; to do what duty called on her to perform, but to be careful of unnecessarily wounding the feelings of her mother. I went down stairs to the room where Madame de Vernon was, where I found Madame de Lebenzei. Madame de Mondeville, as soon as she perceived her, withdrew, and did not enter the apart-

ment. Madame de Lebensei left me alone with Madame de Vernon, promising, as she left the room, to return the same evening, to pass the night with her along with me. "Well!" said Madame de Vernon to me, taking hold of my hand, "a word to you on the subject of my letter. I now stand greatly in need of your support." "Sophia," said I, "pray Heaven may again restore you to health, and I am confident your heart will return to all the feelings for which it was naturally formed." "Alas!" replied she, "as to life, I have done with it; but if your friendship continues unshaken, I shall consider myself less criminal, and I will die with greater composure." "Undoubtedly it continues unabated," said I, "and for you I still entertain the tenderest affection. The recollection of the past for ever holds a place in our souls, and nothing can ever efface it. It keeps its place at the bottom of the heart, even when we think it has lost all its influence over us. Judge, then, what I feel, when I behold your present sufferings, when I see the strength of your attachment to me; when I perceive you ready to become all that nature designed you should be." "Amiable friend," interrupted she, "your words are of the most consolatory nature; and I shall die with greater tranquillity than I deserve."

"I have still," said I, "a most painful duty to perform to you; but you have so much strength of mind, that I am not afraid of presenting to you ideas which would shake the firmness of women of a less vigorous character. Your daughter is extremely desirous that you should fulfil the duties which the Catholic religion imposes on those looking forward to the prospect of dissolution.

To these duties she attaches the highest importance, and in my opinion, you ought to yield to her anxiety on this point. Besides, you will afford a valuable example, by conforming yourself at this solemn moment to the practices which edify the faithful. The greater part of the world will consider it as a proof of your respect for morality and the approbation of the Divine Being. Madame de Vernon hesitated for a few moments before she gave me an answer. She at length said to me, "My dear Delphine, I cannot yield to your request. Dissimulation was the vice which, throughout life, sullied my character. I do not wish that the last act of my existence should be marked by a similar stain. I have always blamed the ceremonies of the Catholic religion: they have in them something so gloomy and terrible, that they do not accord with any ideas I have formed of the goodness of the Parent of Nature. I have, besides, an invincible repugnance to disclose the secrets of my heart to a priest; indeed to no other being but yourself could I reveal the inmost feelings of my soul. I feel that it would be impossible for me to speak with confidence to a man, of whom I am ignorant, or to receive con-



relaxation from that voice to which my heart had previously been a stranger. I believe, if I were forced to see a priest, I would reveal to him none of my secret actions or thoughts. I would have the appearance of making a confession, and confess nothing. I would thus, therefore, assume the false appearance of a fault which I did not possess. I have too long been conversant in hypocrisy, and I do not wish to interrupt the enjoyment (alas! too late experienced,) which sincerity affords. This repugnance does not spring from my rejection of religious ideas; for, on the contrary, my heart receives them with rapture; and, from your kind assistance, my dear Delphine, I trust they will continue to yield me support: but if, with impressions which I really feel, I endeavour to mingle those which I do not experience, the source of that voluntary emotion which you have excited in me will be destroyed. As Madame de Lebenzei wishes to sit up with me to-night, my daughter will seize that opportunity of taking some repose. Continue with me, my dear Delphine, and consecrate those moments which may, perhaps, be the last of my being, to the task of inspiring my soul with all those feelings and ideas, which will at once give it new strength, and melt it into new tenderness. But have the goodness to announce to my daughter my resolution, which is irrevocable." I knew the inflexible character of Madame de Vernon: to have insisted farther, would have been useless; and I promised to act as she desired. "Follow, my dear Sophia," said I, "follow the impulses of your heart! When these are pure, they are all raised to that deity, who manifests himself to us in every virtuous emotion of our souls."

"I have been occupied," added Madame de Vernon, "about all those interests which depended on me. I have, as far as it was in my power, secured all the claims you have on my fortune. I have regulated, with the utmost care, the interests of my daughter; and what was a duty still more imperious, I have written a letter to Leonce, containing a general detail of the injuries I have unhappily been guilty of to you both. This letter will also inform him of the services you have rendered me. I have informed him, in short, that it is to your generosity that my daughter owes the estate which constituted her dowry. This letter will be carried, by one of my domestics, to the courier of the Spanish Ambassador, and in eight hours your conduct will be fully justified to Leonce. I have left it to him to consult you, whether I am deserving of pardon. I have not ventured to introduce into this letter any thing calculated to soften his resentment. My pride suffered a good deal, I confess, at making these confessions, so humiliating to one who never esteemed me, and who will feel, in the perusal of this letter, the strongest emotions of indignation. This idea, which was never absent from my mind, may, perhaps,

have led me to employ expressions much too cold for the strength of my feelings. But it is to you, it is to you alone, that I fully confide my repentance. I have not informed Leonce what is the present state of my health, but of this my death will ere long apprize him. I have not recommended to him, the happiness of Matilda; a prayer from me could only produce irritation: but it is into your hands, my dear Delphine, that I commit the fate of my daughter. Assuredly, it is not for me, to offer counsels to goodness itself; I have only, therefore, to conjure you to satisfy yourself, with recovering the esteem and admiration of Leonce, and not to revive a sentiment, which could only involve those beings in absolute misery." "We shall go together, I hope," answered I, "to the solitude of my sister-in-law, according to the plan we have formed, and never will I quit that sacred retreat."

"We shall go!—alas! that word no longer accords with my situation. But I dare still hope," exclaimed Madame de Vernon, clasping her hands together, with the most ardent emotion—"I dare still hope, that Heaven will repair the ills which I have occasioned you, and grant you many days of future bliss. Your sister-in-law has reason to hate me; soften this sentiment so far, as that she may sometimes be able patiently to hear you talk with affection of your criminal friend."—She continued a long while conversing with me, with the same sweetness, the same tranquillity, and the same anticipation of death. It seemed as if this conviction had divested her mind of all those false ideas, which she had resolved into a system. Now natural qualities regained their empire: she felt delight in the virtuous sentiments to which she resigned herself; and though to find her restored to this situation, augmented my regrets, I experienced a sort of happiness, in having it in my power, once more to esteem her: I felt a gratification, not to be described, in the feelings which the serenity of her aspect inspired, and I could now think of her without blushing, that I had loved her with such tenderness of affection. Though I despaired of her recovery, the length of the conversation was painful to me, as it was expressly contrary to the orders of the physicians; I put her in mind of this repeatedly, and wished her to spare herself this fatiguing exertion. "What," said she to me, "do you not see that I have scarcely twenty-four hours to live? I have had but three days, during which I have enjoyed any thing like peace of mind: suffer me then to unbosom to you all my thoughts, to learn from you, whether they are consistent with virtue, whether they are worthy of that protecting God, whom you supplicate in my behalf, with that angelic voice, which cannot fail to ascend with acceptance to his throne. But come," added she, "go and take some repose: you will in a few hours return to my apartment. The manners of Madame de Lebensei, who returns to-night, please me, and she appears to

be attached to me: my daughter, alas! I have merited what I now suffer, the want of all confidence between us! Adieu, for a little, Delphine! my dear child, adieu." She uttered these words in the same accent, and with the same gestures, which distinguished her when possessed of all her wonted grace and accustomed health. This ray of life, penetrating through the cloud of dissolution, affected me extremely, and I withdrew, to conceal my tears. On recovering myself, I found Matilda waiting for me: it was necessary to inform her of her mother's refusal. She discovered a degree of grief which touched my heart very sorrowfully; but when she began to explain what she thought her duty called on her to do, I had to combat projects the most violent and unfeeling; she frequently expressed her ardent desire to see her mother, to introduce the priest to her on his arrival, and at any price to save her soul from destruction; she accused Madame de Levensci of all, and thought it inconsistent with her duty, to approach the bed of a dying mother, whose expiring moments were soothed by the tender assiduities of a woman, who had been divorced. What do I say! her discourse was a mixture of all that a contracted spirit, under the guidance of fanatical superstition, can produce in a character not naturally depraved, but destitute of a heart sufficiently feeling to triumph over its errors. But it is not her opinions alone that deserve censure. Has not Theresa opinions of a similar kind? But her mild and tender character, opposes to their influence, feelings of the most endearing nature. It was in vain, that for a whole hour, I employed all the arms of reason to convince Matilda of her error. Her mind was impregnable to every remonstrance.\* I should have made no impression if I had still continued endeavouring to persuade her. I happily, however, at length bethought myself of proposing a delay of twenty-four hours; to this proposal she immediately acceded, and in all probability it relieved her from a great deal of internal embarrassment.

Alas! who knows whether Sophia will be alive for twenty-four hours? I will not leave her for a moment, lest Matilda, recurring to her former ideas, should torment her during my absence.

Though I take a very lively interest in the situation of Madame de Vernon, there is one idea which is constantly recurring to my mind. Seven days have elapsed, since Leonce expected my justification, and why has he not received it? In eight hours he will be informed of all, by the letter of Madame de Vernon. With what impressions will he receive it? What sentiments will he entertain of me? I shall not be informed. I have no right to be informed on these points, so connected with my repose. Adieu, my dear sister. Alas! my journey

\* She had got hold of one phrase, which signified nothing, but it was sufficient to support her in her obstinacy.

will not long be delayed, and the poor Sophia shall have ceased to live, before Madame de Mondeville has been able to answer her letter.

## LETTER XVI.

MADAME DE LEBENSEI TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Dec. 2.

WHAT an afflicting scene, Mademoiselle, am I called upon to describe to you! Madame d'Albemar is now in the height of a raging fever, and I myself have scarcely strength enough to perform the duties which my friendship for you, and for her, imposes on me. You condescend, she has told me, to think of me with interest, and it is perhaps to you that I am indebted for that friendship I experience from that perfect creature. Now then, can I ever make a sufficient return for such a service? What a scene! what a character! and can it be possible that circumstances the most disastrous may deprive such a woman of every hope of felicity?

Madame de Vernon is no more; at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, she expired in the arms of Delphine. An unhappy fatality spread the most gloomy influence over her departing moments. I will endeavour, as far as I am able, to give you an account of the events of the last twelve hours, in the order they occurred; they never can be effaced from my memory. Pardon my emotion, if I am unable to resist its power.

Madame d'Albemar went down again to the chamber of Madame de Vernon. She found her reposing on a long chair; her weakness and suffering had not allowed her to continue in bed, the mortal paleness of her countenance would have led one to think that she had ceased to live, had not her eyes, from time to time, kindled as she lifted them up to look on Delphine. Delphine sought in the writings of ancient and modern moralists, of divines and philosophers, for whatever was most calculated to support a spirit sinking under the terror of approaching dissolution. The chamber was fully illuminated, and Madame d'Albemar was sitting beside a lamp whose shaded light shed over her countenance something that was mysterious. She was peculiarly animated while reading those works in which souls of sensibility and minds possessed of high elevation have deposited their generous thoughts. You know her enthusiasm for whatever is grand and noble: this habitual disposition was increased by her anxiety to make a profound impression on the heart of Madame de Vernon. Her voice, at all times touching, had in it something of solemnity. Often she raised looks to heaven, worthy of the

purest adoration. Her uplifted hand took the Divine Being to witness the truth of her words, and her whole attitude had in it a grace and a majesty altogether inexpressible.

I know not where Delphine found what she said; perhaps it was the effect of inspiration; but never was death sustained by calmer images, by more pleasing ideas; never was a greater force given to those feeling and religious impressions which sweetly lead the departing spirit from the feeble rays of expiring life to the darkness of the tomb.

On a sudden, at some distance from the house of Madame de Vernon, a window opened, and we heard the sounds of melodious music. From the time of the night, and the stilness of all surrounding nature, it seemed to come from a fête that was still protracted. Madame de Vernon who had hitherto been very composed, burst into tears at this idea. The same emotion seized Delphine and me; but recovering herself first, and taking Madame de Vernon's hand, she said to her with tenderness: "Yes, my dear friend, in that habitation, nothing is known but pleasure, whilst this is the house of sorrow; but a few years and all pass away, and those who now rejoice shall mourn, and the soul reconciled with its God, as with itself, shall know suffering no more for ever."

These words had the effect of restoring Madame de Vernon to composure, and almost at the same moment the sound of the music ceased. What a picture was that which I witnessed! Reproach, singularly remarkable, heightened its effect. I heard from Madame de Vernon herself, that, on many occasions, she had cruelly injured Madame d'Albemar; and I reflected on the combination of circumstances which gave Madame de Vernon, so much courted, and so much admired in the world, as her only support, her only friend, in her dying moments, the very woman whom she had wounded in all that is dearest to the heart.

When Madame de Vernon wished to speak to Delphine of her repentance, she gently declined this conversation, talked to her of her friendship for her, with a delicacy and a propriety which banished the remembrance of her conduct, and fixed the mind only on the contemplation of her amiable qualities. Delphine assiduously gave to her expiring friend the momentary relief which alleviated her sufferings. She gently replaced her on the sofa, asked her about her complaints with the most delicate attention; and, without betraying her fears, she discovered the extent of her pity. The genius of goodness inspired Delphine; and her figure, rendered more interesting by the emotions of her soul, gave such an unaccountable charm to her actions that I was almost tempted to ask, whether some miraculous change had been effected in her nature. But this miracle was nothing more than the astonishing union of sensibility and of grace, of genius and of beauty.

Poor Madame de Vernon! she had at least enjoyed a few hours of repose; and, during the night, I had observed on her countenance an expression more calm and more pure than in the gayest moments of her existence. I hope that her soul has not lost the fruit of that noble enthusiasm which Delphine had inspired. At length the morning began to dawn. It was one of the darkest and coldest days of winter. It snowed heavily, and the cold that was felt within added to the horror by which this afflicting day was to be distinguished. Madame de Vernon was gradually becoming more weak, and her vomiting of blood became more frequent and more overwhelming. I was convinced that even, if she had escaped the cruel sufferings she had endured, it was impossible for her to survive another day.

The physician came, and Madame de Mondeville arrived soon after. I must do her the justice to say, that her countenance was greatly altered: she seemed to have been weeping much. Madame de Vernon remarked the change in her appearance, and received her very affectionately. The physician, having made the necessary inquiries respecting the situation of Madame de Vernon, who, on her part, never put a question to him, left the room in company with Madame de Mondeville. It is probable, he informed her, that her mother had only a few hours more to live. Matilda's confessor, who has neither the moderation nor the liberality of some men of his class, then took advantage of her blind zeal, and prevailed on her to conduct him to her mother, notwithstanding that Madame de Vernon had refused to see him.

Madame d'Albemar and I trembled when we saw Matilda enter the room, accompanied by her priest; but it was now too late to interrupt her. She addressed Madame de Vernon with great emotion. "Mother," said she, "if you would not make me die of grief, do not reject those heavenly admonitions which can alone save you from eternal torments.—I conjure you, in the name of God and Jesus Christ, do not reject them." On concluding these words, she threw herself on her knees before her mother.—"Fool!" exclaimed Delphine, "do you imagine that you serve the Supreme Being, by exciting the most painful feelings in the breast of your mother?"—"You ruin my mother's soul," replied Matilda with indignation; "you destroy her, Delphine, with your pusillanimous conduct, your uncertainties, and your doubts; and you, Madame," said she, turning to me, "you also are the enemy of her happiness, because you wish to discard that religion which condemns yourself."—I heard these words without the smallest anger; so much was I affected by the situation of Madame de Vernon, and the anxieties of Delphine. I remarked, however, a very striking expression in the countenance of Madame de Vernon,

who, soon after, pronounced the following words with an energy which, in her situation, was truly extraordinary.

“—Daughter,” said she to Matilda, “I pardon your inconsiderate zeal: I ought to pardon you, for I have been much to blame in not educating you myself. I have neglected to improve your mind, and no intimate relations of confidence have existed between us. I consulted your interests, but I never cultivated your understanding. I am now punished for my misconduct, since, at this awful moment of death, our hearts are separated. Alas! the mother and the daughter are incapable of one common feeling, even when they have to bid each other an eternal adieu!

“But, sir,” said she, addressing herself to the priest, who remained at the bottom of the room, in a grave attitude, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and had not yet offered to speak a word—“why, sir, have you used the ascendancy you possess over the weak mind of my child, to expose her to the greatest of evils, that of afflicting a dying mother? I respect religion; my heart is filled with the love of a beneficent God, and his goodness inspires me with the hope of another life: but when about to appear before him to whom all truths are known, I should act a very bad part, were I to disguise my thoughts by external ceremonies inconsistent with my opinions. I choose rather to confess my heart to God than to you, whom I know not, or any other priest with whom I am not connected by the ties of friendship or confidence. I am more certain of the sincerity of my regret than the frankness of my confessions. No man can inform me whether God will pardon me: the voice of my conscience is a better monitor than you. Leave me, then, to die in peace, surrounded by the friends with whom I have lived, and whose happiness has already suffered too much from my conduct; but if they are reconciled to me, if they are touched by my repentance, they will implore the Divine Mercy in my favour, and, in the hope that their prayers will be heard, I wish for none from others. This angel,” pointing to Delphine, “this angel whom I have so much injured, will intercede for me with the Supreme Being. Retire, then, sir; your ministry is finished, when you cannot convince. Were you to resort to any other means to obtain your object, you would disgrace the sanctity of your mission.”

When Madame de Vernon concluded, the priest fell upon his knees; and, after kissing the cross which he wore on his breast, said, in a tone of solemnity, but which appeared to me formal and affected: “Accursed is the man who seeketh to fathom the ways of Christ, and despiseth his authority! Wretched is the sinner who dieth impenitent.”—He then made a sign to Matilda, and they both departed in the most profound silence.

I know not whether Madame de Mondeville retained the

priest in order to bring him back to her mother, when she should no longer have sufficient strength to oppose such a proceeding; or whether she thought that it would be most efficacious to perform divine service for her while she was still living; but she shut herself up in her apartment, where she joined in prayers with her confessor and some domestics attached to the same opinions. In this manner she separated herself from her mother in her last moments, and neglected to bestow on her that care which filial duty would have dictated. A strange mixture of superstition and obstinacy, and a mistaken love of duty combined in her soul, with a real affection for her mother; but the bitter and cruel proofs she gave of that affection proved the torment of both. However, it was owing to this singular absence from her mother's chamber that Matilda avoided a scene which would have for ever deprived her of repose and happiness.

The effort made by Madame de Vernon, and the emotion she had experienced, affected her so greatly as to produce a terrible vomiting of blood, after Matilda and her confessor left the room; she fainted at length in the arms of Madame d'Albemar. Our cares again recalled her to life; Delphine, infinitely alarmed by this accident, which we thought was the last, threw herself on her knees before the bed-chair on which her dying friend sat, and inclined her face on Madame de Vernon's hands, endeavouring to restore the vital heat which had abandoned them. Her fine fair hair loosened, and fell down in disorder.—At this moment I heard two doors open with a violence very remarkable in a house where the greatest precautions had been taken to prevent the least noise which might disturb Madame de Vernon. I also heard the sound of the footsteps of some person who advanced with great precipitation. I arose, and saw Leonce enter with a letter in his hand—it was that in which Madame de Vernon had explained her conduct. He trembled with rage; he was pale with cold; and his whole appearance was that of a man who had just made a long journey. Indeed he had just arrived from Madrid, having travelled during seven days and seven nights in the midst of winter, without taking any rest. Distracted by physical and moral pain, and agitated by a thousand feelings, he entered Madame de Vernon's house, without speaking a word to any individual.

Delphine, having turned round her head, screamed on observing Leonce, and extended her arms towards him, without knowing what she did. This movement, and the alteration in the looks of Delphine, almost completed the derangement of Leonce's mind. Seizing Delphine eagerly by the arms, as if he would have pulled her away, and addressing himself to Madame de Vernon, whose face was concealed from him by a curtain half drawn before her bed-chair, he exclaimed, "What



are you doing to this unfortunate—What new scheme of perfidy are you employing against her? This letter which you addressed to me in Spain, I received, while coming here, from the courier intrusted with it. I received it while I was hastening to procure explanations respecting those tormenting doubts which the silence of Delphine and the letter of a friend had excited in my mind. Here is the letter which contains the recital of your barbarous deceptions. I was not to receive it, you said, until after the departure of Delphine; was this a new trick, contrived to prevent my return, and to involve the unfortunate Delphine in some snare during my absence?" "Leonce," said Madame d'Albemar, "how unjust and cruel you are! Do you not know that Madame de Vernon is dying?"

—"Dying!" replied Leonce; "no, I do not believe it: she may feign, to interest your feelings. Will you allow yourself to be again deceived by the detestable address of this woman? You wrote to me, Delphine, that I might rely on what Madame de Vernon told me; and she took advantage of this proof of your confidence to persuade me that you loved M. de Serbellane, while you were a generous victim, sacrificing yourself to the reputation of Madame d'Ervins! Ah! Delphine, you supposed I was informed of the truth; you must then have thought that I was the weakest, the most ungrateful, and most insensible of mankind, that I blamed you for your virtues, and abandoned you on account of your misfortunes. I have faults, and they have been made use of, to make it probable that I should conduct myself with the greatest cruelty towards the best, the most amiable of beings. Still this is not all—an obstacle arising from want of fortune separated me from Matilda, and that obstacle was removed by Delphine, who thus gave the example of the most unbounded generosity, and became the victim of the most shameless ingratitude. I was kept ignorant of this service, and she was punished for having performed it.—All is mystery around me. I am beset by falsehoods; and when I learn that I am loved, that I have always been loved (said he, in accents which would have rent your heart;) I am bound, irrevocably bound! I see the being I adore, the object of my eternal affection! She extends her arms towards me—her countenance is impressed with grief, yet I cannot relieve her! I repulsed her, when she seemed to advance towards me, when, perhaps, she shed tears of sorrow for my mistake—and it was you!" exclaimed he, turning again to Madame de Vernon, "it was you——"

I felt the deepest compassion for the inexpressible anguish of this unfortunate woman; and Delphine, who suffered still more from her feelings, exclaimed, "Stop, stop, Leonce! An unfortunate accident has brought her to the brink of the grave.

Oh! if you knew by how many affecting and sincere regrets she has since endeavoured to repair the fault which maternal love induced her to commit." "She will be well punished," cried Leonce, "if it was her daughter she wished to serve: she shall reproach her both for her own misfortunes and mine. Break," perfidious woman, said he to Madame de Vernon, "break the chain which your falsehoods have forged: restore to me the happy day which preceded that on which I first heard your deceitful tongue; on which I still was free to espouse Delphine; restore it to me——" "Oh, Leonce!" replied Madame de Vernon, "do not pursue me into the grave: accept my repentance"——"Be again yourself," said Delphine, interrupting her, and addressing Leonce, "look at the situation of this unfortunate woman: can you be inaccessible to pity?"——"Why pity?" resumed he, with a ferocious wildness; "pity for what? For her? Ah! if she be really dying, Heaven grant that I might change conditions with her; that I were placed on her bed of pain, regretted by Delphine, and that she wore in my stead the chains with which she has led me! She would then repay that long destiny of pain to which her profound dissimulation has condemned me." "Barbarian!" exclaimed Delphine, "what must be done to soften you; to obtain one kind word, which may console the last moments of the poor Sophia! Do you think that I have not also suffered? Since I lost the hope of being united to you, I have seen no day on which I did not hate to live. I beg of you, by my tears——" "By your misfortunes, which she has caused," interrupted Leonce, "what do you ask of me?——"

Delphine was about to answer him; but Madame de Vernon, arising like a spectre from the tomb, and supporting herself on me, signified, by a sign, that she wished to speak. As she advanced, supported on my arm, she came out of the recess in which her bed-chair was placed, and her whole body was in the light. Leonce was struck with her melancholy state, of which he was not able to judge before. This spectacle instantly calmed his fury. He sighed, cast down his eyes, and I saw, even before Madame de Vernon began to speak, that the whole disposition of his soul was changed.

"Delphine," said Madame de Vernon, "ask not of Leonce a pardon which he cannot grant me, since his whole heart disavows it: I have merited the punishment which he has made me experience. You wished, my dear Delphine, to render the close of my life too happy; I was not sufficiently afflicted: but prevail on him only to promise, that he will not render Matilda miserable. Let my faults be buried with me; but, oh! let not their consequences make my memory odious. Prevail on him, I beseech you, to conceal from Matilda the history of his marriage and his love for you." "To whom," replied Leonce, whose indignation had given place to the

most profound melancholy, "to whom would you promise happiness? Alas! I have none; I can diffuse around me nothing but sorrow."—"If you, also, refuse this prayer," said Madame de Vernon, "your severity will be too great for me; yes, too great indeed."—I felt her sinking in my arms, I hastened to place her on the sofa.

Delphine, animated by a generous emotion, which elevated her even above her love for Leonce, then approached to Madame de Vernon, and said to her, in a solemn voice, and accent of inspiration: "It is indeed too much; and this cruel Leonce, insensible to our prayers, is not the interpreter of Heaven's justice to you. I take you under my protection; if he injures you, to me the offence will be given; if he do not pronounce at your feet, words calculated to calm your soul, from my heart he shall be alienated. You ask him to respect the happiness of your daughter, I will answer for her happiness: this I swear to her expiring mother; and if Leonce wishes to preserve my esteem, and that recollection of love which is still dear to us, in the midst of our sorrows, he will never disturb the peace of Matilda, he will never diminish the respect she owes to the memory of her parent. O unfortunate Sophia! though Leonce has filled your heart with anguish, I pledge myself for the accomplishment of your wishes. Listen to me, I beg of you; listen only to me."—"Yes, I hear you," said Madame de Vernon, in a voice scarcely audible, "I hear you, Delphine, and I bless you: the benediction of the dying is always holy; receive it; come near me——" She then laid her head on Delphine's shoulder.

On seeing this, Leonce fell on his knees before Madame de Vernon, and exclaimed, "Yes, I am too cruel: Oh! Delphine is an angel; pardon me, that *she* may pardon me also: pardon me the evil I have done you." "Do you hear, Sophia," said Madame d'Albemar to Madame de Vernon, who made no reply to Leonce—"do you hear? he is no longer unjust; he is reconciled to you." "Yes," said Leonce, "he is reconciled to you, but perhaps he is himself about to die." The fatigue of his long journey in the middle of winter, without any repose, and the agitation he had experienced affected him so much, that he fell senseless before us.

Judge of my alarm—think what were the feelings of Delphine. Madame de Vernon's hands, already cold with death, grasped hers, and she could not stir from the spot, though Leonce was near her, stretched seemingly lifeless on the floor. Madame de Vernon, in the midst of her last convulsions, pressed once more the hand of Delphine, and expired. Delphine, in a state which it is impossible to describe, supported the body of her friend in her arms, and, with her eyes fixed on Leonce, repeatedly called to me thus—"Madame de Lebenœi, just Heaven!—Does he still live? Tell me, does he live?" My cries soon brought Madame de Mondeville to the

room. Her mother no longer lived, and her husband, whom she believed to be in Spain, lay motionless before her. She imagined that his grief for the death of her mother had thrown him into this state; and, much affected at finding him so indisposed, she displayed a presence of mind which rendered her really interesting.

Leonce was removed to another chamber: Delphine remained during the whole of this time immoveable, and plunged into a deep reverie. Her friend, who was no more, still rested on her bosom; and she, as it were, asked me with her eyes, what I thought of the situation of Leonce? I assured her, that he would soon recover, and that the emotions he felt, added to the fatigue he had sustained, were the only causes of the accident which had befallen him. At this moment Madame de Mondeville entered with her priests, and all the apparatus of death. Delphine, who now perceived that Madame de Vernon had ceased to live, gently placed on her bed this woman at once interesting and criminal. She then knelt, and kissed her hand with affection and respect: after which we left the room, and she allowed me to conduct her back to her own house, but spoke not a word.

As I found that she was threatened with a very high fever, I caused her to be put to bed: We sent several times to inquire after Leonce; and we learned that, though he recovered from the swoon, he was still unwell, but not in any danger. M. Barton, who by a fortunate accident arrived yesterday evening, came to see Delphine this morning. She was so agitated, that it would not have been prudent to have allowed her to converse with him. He only told me, that having obtained Madame d'Albemar's promise not to write to Leonce, lest he should be irritated against his mother-in-law, he had however thought it right to say a few words, to calm him, in a letter which he sent to Spain; but the obscurity of that letter, and the silence of Delphine, produced so much anxiety in Leonce's mind, that he left Spain immediately, hoping to arrive at Paris before the departure of Madame d'Albemar for Languedoc.

M. Barton has not concealed from me his uneasiness respecting the resolutions of Leonce. He receives the attention of Madame de Mondeville with kindness; but when he is alone with M. Barton, he appears invariably determined to pass his life with Madame d'Albemar. His passion for her has now increased to such a height, that it seems impossible to restrain it. M. Barton has no hope but in the courage and virtue of Madame d'Albemar. It is his opinion that she ought to refuse to see Leonce, and put in execution her plan of returning to you. This, I doubt not, is also the determination of Delphine, for I have heard her repeat, in a low voice, when she has supposed herself alone—*No, I ought not to see him again; I love him too much; he also loves me: no, it must not be: we must part.*

What, however, must become of Leonce and Delphine? With their sentiments, and their situation, how can they exist either separate or together? My husband is come here, and he has restored the courage which had abandoned me. He says he will try to offer some consolation to Madame d'Albemar: but what good can be expected to be done even by him, though he is one of the most ingenious of mankind? Your perfect friendship, madam, may discover consolations which I seek for in vain. I am convinced of the energy of Madame d'Albemar's character, and the severity of her principles; but this, alas! is certain, that there is no resolution, which can henceforth reconcile her happiness and her duty.

Accept, Mademoiselle, the homage of my respect and regard for you.

ELIZA DE LEBENSEL.

## LETTER XVII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, Dec. 4, 1790.

THE perfidy of men has separated us, my Delphine, but let love reunite us! let us efface the past from our memories! what are external circumstances to us? Do you not see all the objects which surround us as through a cloud? Do you feel their reality? I believe in nothing but in you. I have a confused knowledge that I have been shamefully deceived; that I have reproached a dying woman with the deception; that her daughter says she is my wife:—I know it: but one single image stands forward amid the obscurity and uncertainty of my recollection:—it is you, Delphine: I see you at the foot of this bed of death, endeavouring to restrain my rage; fixing your eyes on me with a look of mildness and of love. I wish again to meet that look. I that alone can calm the feverish agitation which prevents me from recovering my strength.

Did not my excellent friend Barton tell me yesterday that it was your intention to depart, and to depart without seeing me! I did not believe him; for what pleasure could your gentle nature feel in compelling me to follow your steps like a person deprived of his reason? You have not imagined, you could not possibly entertain the idea, that I could resign myself to the idea of living without you. No: because an atrocious combination has prevented me from being your husband, I will not consent to see you one day, or one hour less frequently than if we had been united to each other. We are united—all is falsehood in my other connexion—nothing is truth but my love—but yours; for you love me. Delphine, I conjure you, tell me on the day, the day on which I contracted this

marriage, which can exist only in the eyes of the world: this marriage of which all the oaths are null and void, since they all supposed that you had ceased to love me: were you not behind a pillar, a witness to this fatal ceremony? I then believed that my imagination alone had created this illusion; but if it be true that it was really you whom I saw, why did you not throw yourself into my arms? Why did you not claim your lover in the face of heaven? Oh! I should have recognised your voice; it would have convinced me of your innocence; and before that same altar, placing your hand upon my heart, I should have sworn to you that love which I can feel for you alone!

But what imports this ceremony? It is nugatory, since it is to Matilda that it has united me. Delphine, whose superior mind emancipates itself at the dictates of reason from the opinion of the world, will not reject love from a timid respect for the judgment of mankind. Your true duty is to love me. Was I not your first choice? Am I not the only being for whom your celestial soul felt that durable and profound affection on which the fate of your life must depend. Oh! my dearest, though no person can see you without admiring you, I alone can enjoy with delight every word you utter; I alone lose not the slightest of your glances. Suffer me to adore you in all the gradations of your charms: love me that you may be elated with yourself; for I will teach you all your worth: I will discover to you virtues, qualities, seductive graces, which you possess, without knowing that they adorn you.

Oh, Delphine, the laws of society were formed for the mass of mankind; but when a love without example preys on the heart, when a perfidy almost equally rare has separated two persons who had chosen each other, who had loved each other, who had promised themselves to each other; can you suppose that these laws, calculated for the ordinary circumstances of life, ought to bind such sentiments. If before the legal tribunals, I could prove that it was by the most infamous artifice that my consent was extorted, would they not determine that my marriage ought to be annulled? And because I have only moral proofs to allege; because the honour of the world does not permit me to assign them, may I not pronounce in my conscience the judgment which the laws would confirm were I to appeal to them? May I, from the bottom of my heart, not declare myself free.

Alas! I know it well: I am not permitted to give you my name; to glory in my love in presence of the world; to defend and protect you as your husband. You must renounce for me those advantages which I cannot promise you, and which so many would gladly lay at your feet. But I am certain you would readily make to me this sacrifice; you would not wish to punish an unhappy wretch for the mean

perfidy of which he has been the victim. Ah! when this miserable being reproaches himself with having too easily believed calumny, when he execrates his conduct in despair; when he is on the point of detesting himself, then, Delphine, then especially must you feel the necessity of consoling that friend who can find no repose in his own heart. Yes, I hate, by turns, the authors of my miseries and myself. My agonizing thoughts hurry me incessantly from indignation against the conduct of others, to indignation against my own errors.

I wish to conceal nothing from you, Delphine; by enumerating all the sacrifices I require from you, I shall not terrify your generous heart. Our union, however careful I may be to treat with honour and respect her whom I adore, will be more prejudicial to your reputation than to mine. Will this fear prevent you? I have less right than any other to condemn it. But hear me, Delphine, whether reasonable or puerile, whether noble or feeble motives part you from me, is of no consequence to me. I will never survive our separation. Now you know this, it belongs to you to judge what is the power of your will. Has it sufficient strength to support you against your regret and grief for my death? Delphine, are you certain that you have this strength! Beware—I do not believe that you have.

Had I not seen you till after my destiny had united me to Matilda, I ought, perhaps I might have been able, to have resisted love. But to have known you when I was free, to have been the object of your choice, and then to be bound to another; this is a crime that ought to be punished, and I will make myself the victim, if you resolve that the dreadful consequences of my fault must be such, that my heart must be for ever tormented by repentance.

How! my happiness shall be torn from me, not by necessity, not by chance, but by a voluntary act, by an irreparable act! Let those who can bear that word *irreparable*, continue to live. As for me I believe it came from hell; it belongs not to the language of men; their imagination cannot endure it. It announces an eternity of punishment; it expresses in itself the most intolerable tortures.

Amid all the natural violence of my character, I never had an idea of the misery which seized me, when I feared that I might lose you; and lose you by the effect of my own resolutions, of the sentiments to which I had yielded; of the words which I had pronounced. Delphine, in expressing this fear, which pursues me without intermission, I have been obliged to interrupt myself. I had relapsed into that fit of rage in which you saw me when I accused, without pity, Madame de Vernon: to calm my feelings, I repeated to myself that you would not brave my despair. O, my Delphine, I shall see you again; I shall see you as soon as possible.

I am assured that to-morrow I shall be well enough to go out. I will then come to you: can it be possible that your door should be shut against me? But whence this fear? Do I not know your generous heart? your mind eminently endowed with courage and independence. What motive can prevent you from having pity on an unfortunate wretch who is dear to you, and who can no longer live without you.

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## LETTER XVIII.

### ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

*What motive can prevent me from seeing you?* Personal or timid sentiments, Leonce, have no power over me. Heaven is my judge that I would give up all the possible advantages of interest for one hour, one single hour which I might be permitted to pass with you without remorse; but what gives me strength to disdain all appearances, and raise myself even above public opinion, is the certainty that I have done no wrong: I do not fear men while my conscience reproaches me with nothing. They would indeed make me tremble, had I lost that support.

We are very unfortunate: O Leonce! can you believe that I do not feel this? A few months since every thing seemed to unite to assure to us the most perfect felicity. I was free; my situation and my perfect fortune secured to me perfect independence: I saw you; I loved you with all the feelings of my heart, when a fatal blow, which the slightest circumstance, which a single word might have warded off, separated us for ever! O, my friend! reproach yourself no more for what has happened: it was destiny alone that has rendered us both wretched.

Do you not think that I ought also to accuse myself as the cause of my own misfortune? Frequently I accuse this irrevocable destiny. I view the past, as if it were still future. I bitterly repent that I did not go to seek you when I had resolved it a hundred times. Despair seizes me when I recollect this pride, this miserable weakness, which bittered my actions, when my heart inspired me with freedom and courage.

If it can assuage your pains which you suffer, Leonce, to reflect whenever it may be, that at that same instant, Delphine your poor friend, overwhelmed with her misfortunes, implores Heaven for aid to support them, Heaven, which before had always granted her succour, but which now she im-



plores in vain; if this idea, at once painful and consoling, can mitigate your sufferings, you may resign yourself to it. But what are your griefs to our duties? Does not virtue, which we adored in the days of our prosperity, still remain the same? Ought she to have less power over us, because the moment of fulfilling what we admired is arrived?

Fate has not willed that the most pure enjoyments of moral feeling should be granted to us. Perhaps, my friend, Providence has judged us worthy of performing the most noble act that can be exhibited to the world—the sacrifice of love to virtue. Perhaps, alas! I have need, in order to support myself, to revolve in my mind every thing that can raise my enthusiasm; and I feel, with grief, that for you, for you alone, Leonce, I experience those sallies of the soul, with which I was heretofore inspired by the generous love of virtue.

It is yet in our power to govern our actions, our happiness is no longer in our power. Let us resign it to the care of Heaven, which, after many exertions, will bestow on us tranquillity;—Yes, tranquillity at last. What a futurity is before us! Long sufferings, and the repose of the dead for our only hope. Yet must we, Leonce, either disavow the only principles of which we were so proud, or resign ourselves the victims of what they require of us.

You will easily perceive by this letter what conflicts I undergo! If you longer entertain a hope, you deceive yourself. I know that the duties I loved, no longer have any charms in my eyes; that love has discoloured all the other sentiments of my life, that I must struggle every moment against the affections of my heart, which forcibly draw me towards you. I know it, and I consent to declare it to you; but this is only because I have resolved never more to see you. Shall I tell you the secret of my weakness? determined as I am on the greatest, the most painful, the most heroic of sacrifices, I may be permitted to believe myself released from every other effort.

I will follow the plan which I had formed before your return from Spain. What a change has taken place since that return! I have seen you, and a new obstacle opposes my departure. To see you is the greatest of dangers; and against this only danger, this only happiness, I must summon up all my resolution. Be not angry at this determination: think what it must have cost me. Have pity on me; and let all your love become pity.

I endeavour to strengthen my soul to execute my resolution; but do you know how I now pass my life?—I do not suffer myself to be at leisure an instant, that I may stifle, if possible, the emotions of my heart. I invent a multitude of useless occupations to suspend the activity of my thoughts. Sometimes I walk in my garden with hasty steps, to pro-

cure it, I take opium to force a slumber of a few hours. I fear to be alone during the night, which leaves to grief all its power, and enfeebles reason alone.

I should already have set out, had you not declared that you will follow me. I enjoin you to give me your word that you will not. How would you be exposed by such an act? How much would you wrong your wife, whose happiness, for many reasons, I ought ever to hold sacred? And what would you gain, should you persist in this mad resolution? In the midst of the road, on some spot rendered rigid by the frosts of winter, I should see you again, and die with grief at your feet, if I should not find in myself strength sufficient to fulfil my duty by leaving you for ever.

Leonce, there are in destiny, events, which cannot be avoided, and to struggle against their power, can only sink us deeper in the abyss of misfortune. Let us merit by our virtues, the protection of a benevolent Deity to carry this resolution into effect. We can do nothing for ourselves with success. Let us enter on a devoted life, a life of sacrifices and of duties, it has almost always bestowed happiness on virtuous souls. Look at Madame d'Erwins, the victim of love and repentance. She is about to shut herself up in a convent for ever. She has refused the hand of her lover; she renounces supreme felicity, though this felicity would have cost no person a tear.

It is I who resist your prayers; and it is I, nevertheless, who must bear in my heart a sentiment which nothing can efface. When I saw myself despised and even insulted by you, I loved you. I endeavoured to find in myself faults which might excuse your injustice. Ah! forget me not! Is there any duty which commands you to forget me? Should such a duty exist, let it be disobeyed. Were I to feel myself a second time abandoned by your affection; were I doomed again to enter the gloomy solitude of life, I could not support it.

Leonce, let us establish between us certain relations which may be for ever dear to us. Every year, on the second of December, the day on which you ceased to believe me culpable, go into that church in which I saw you, for I cannot resolve to deny it, into that church in which I saw you give your hand to Matilda. Think on me, in that place, leaning against the pillar, behind which I heard the oath which must cause me an eternal suffering. Alas! why were not my exclamations heard? I should only have braved men; and now I must brave the Deity himself in yielding to see you.

Leonce, until this day, I can present to the Supreme Being a life without blemish. If you wish not that I should preserve this treasure, pronounce that I have lived long enough. I will receive the order from your hand with joy. When I feel the approach of death, I shall still enjoy a moment of happiness equal to all that awaits me. I will permit myself to call you

to me, to tell you that I love you. Do you wish this? Tell me you do, this wish would not be cruel: is it not sufficient that my heart, the judge of yours, is grateful to you for it?

I love myself while I write to you: I am no longer mistress of my thoughts or words; I must forbid myself even this last pleasure. Adieu.

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## LETTER XIX.

### LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

You will depart without seeing me! you will? the earth shall fail beneath my steps, before I cease to follow you. Can you believe that you may escape my love! it will vanquish all things, and even your resolves. Respect a passionate affection—I repeat, respect it. You know not what evils you will draw on yourself by braving it.

I have been this morning at your door, though still so weak I am scarcely able to support myself, and was refused admittance. I walked for some time in your court-yard; for your servants would not permit me to enter the house. Madame d'Artenas was with you. I did not wish to cause an alarm. I raised my eyes towards your apartment, and thought I could perceive your elegant form behind a curtain. But even the shadow of you at length disappeared, and your waiting-woman came to bring me your letter, requesting me, on your part, to read it before I asked to see you. I obeyed: I know not what disturbance of mind overpowered me. If you leave your residence, if you depart without my knowledge, if I know not whither you are gone! no, you will not condemn your unhappy lover to seek you in vain in every place, incessantly thinking that he sees you, yet incessantly losing you, and hurrying with vain efforts after your image, as in those dreadful dreams which cannot be prolonged without causing death.

Delphine, you who have never been able to support the spectacle of suffering; am I then to be made the only exception to your compassionate goodness? And because I love you, because you likewise love me? To my grief nothing? Do you not consider it as your duty to console me? Oh! what had I done to men? What had I done to that perfidious woman who gave me her daughter, when I ought to have dedicated my destiny to you? And you who ask me to pardon, by what right do you ask it if you are more inflexible towards me than you have been towards my persecutors?

You refuse to hear me, yet you know not what I have to say to you, and what it is necessary that I should say to you: O Delphine never have I been able to speak to you from the bottom of my heart: a thousand circumstances have prevented

us from seeing each other without restraint. Might it be granted me to converse with you once, once only, without interruption, without counting the hours, I feel that I should persuade you; you would be convinced that nothing similar to our situation has ever existed: that we have chosen each other when we had power to choose, when we were at liberty to dispose of ourselves. It was necessary to deceive us to disunite us. Our souls have entered into no voluntary engagement. Before your God we are free. O Delphine! you who revere, who inspire others with the love of eternal Providence; can you believe that it has given me, the sentiments I feel only to condemn me to vanquish them? When nature shudders at the approach of pain, nature warns man to avoid it: and shall her instinct be less powerful with respect to the pains of the soul. If mine is goaded by despair at the thought of losing you, ought I to resign myself to that idea without a struggle? No, Delphine, no, I know not what the most rigid moralists have required of man; but when an unknown power places in my heart the devouring necessity of seeing you again, that power, by whatever name it may be called, imperiously forbids that I should separate myself from you.

I am ready solemnly to promise, that when I shall have seen you, I will leave it to you to determine on our fate; but I must express to you the sentiments by which I am oppressed. By day, by night, I speak to you; I seem to myself to show to you in my sentiments, in our situation, truths of which you were ignorant, and which I alone could teach you. When I write to you I no longer recollect what had passed in my mind; I cannot likewise, I cannot communicate in my letters that accent which heaven has given us to convince; and if it be true, that could I speak to you, you would consent to pass your days with me, think, Delphine, to what a condition you reduce me, by condemning me without suffering me to plead before you for my life.

You have assumed so peremptory a resolution against my misery, that you must believe yourself certain that you shall refuse me, after having heard me. Why then will you not for a moment afford me the consolation of making this vain attempt, over which your firmness will triumph? Delphine, if we must part, if we absolutely must, would you wish to leave in my heart a harsh sentiment against you? Angel of goodness, would you wish it? You did not refuse your attention, your celestial consolations to Madame de Vernon; to her who separated us; and can you believe, Delphine, that I am so far from death, that at least a farewell is not my due.

You saw the violence of my character, on that fatal day, on which, had it not been for you, I should have shown myself still more implacable. Think how acute must be my feelings now that I am shut up in my house with a woman who has

taken your place! O Delphine! I am only fifty paces from you, yet I cannot obtain a sight of you. I send ten times a day to be assured that you have not yet ordered the preparations for your departure. I tremble like a child at every noise. I construe the most simple events into presages. Every thing seems to announce to me that I shall see you no more. You speak of your grief, Delphine; but your mild soul has never experienced any impressions which it could not govern. The grief of a man is violent and fierce: strength cannot long struggle without triumphing or perishing.

How can you endure that I should remain in this wretched condition, and refuse a word that would put an end to it, as if by enchantment? I no longer know you. You suffer your ideas of virtue to change your character. Beware! you will render it harsh and unfeeling; you will lose that perfect goodness, the true impress of the divine nature. If you can become insensible to what I feel, what grief, what suffering can ever move your compassion. It is sensibility which diffuses over your charms that celestial expression. What an exchange will you make, if, by fulfilling what you term your duties, you lose the generous warmth of your soul, and stifle all those involuntary emotions with which your virtues and your love inspire you!

Endeavour not by vain subtleties to distinguish between your conscience and your heart. Ask that heart; does it reject the idea of seeing me as it repels that of a vile or cruel act? No; it draws you towards me. It is your god, it is nature, it is your lover, who speaks to you: listen to one of these, the protecting powers of your destiny. It is in your inmost heart that they exercise their empire. Let us forget every thing that is not us; our souls are sufficient to us. Let us in thought annihilate the whole universe, and be happy;

Happy!—Do you know what I call happiness? It is an hour! a single hour of conversation with you, and you refuse it me; I restrain myself; I conceal from you what I feel at this idea; it is not by terrifying your heart that I wish to make an impression on it; let tenderness alone excite in it emotion! Delphine, a single hour! and after that you may—if you can still entertain the cruel intention.—Yes, after that you may—separate yourself from me.

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## LETTER XX.

### ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

If I see you again, Leonce, never shall I have sufficient strength of mind to endure the pangs of separation. Could I

deny you this parting interview; could I deny it in opposition to my most ardent wishes, if I were not firmly convinced that to see you and to leave you is impossible. Why do you speak of virtue and inflexibility? It is you who ought to complain of my weakness, and leave me to submit to the sacrifice which alone can restore me to my own esteem. Whatever it may cost me to describe what is the strength of my feelings, it is now proper to disclose to you the extent of your dominion over me. You will then yourself admit, that it was my duty to quit my house to be beyond the reach of your influence.

You had written to me that it was your intention to visit me this morning, and I have had sufficient command over myself to give orders that you should not be admitted. I have spent a considerable part of the night in writing to you, and I wish to be alone all the day. I determined after I had prohibited your presence to suffer no one to approach me. Madame d'Artenas gained admission to my house, but, under the pretence that I was busy, I left her to peruse in my library a book which interested her, while I remained in my chamber. I stood behind my window curtains with my eyes fixed on the entrance to the house, and holding in my hand the letter that I had written to you; and which I hoped, at least, would have the effect of softening the severity of my refusal.

In this situation I continued almost an hour, in a state of anxiety which would probably affect you, if your resentment against me could be softened.

As long as I heard no noise I confirmed myself in the resolution which duty imposed upon me; but when the door opened I felt my heart sink within me, and I experienced the desire of once more returning to him, whom I had determined to renounce for ever, again resuming its power. At length you make your appearance, and you advance a few paces to the domestic who was to inform you that I could not receive your visit. Your gait was marked with the traces of recent illness; your features appeared to me altered; but still I confess to you, that never did I discover in the expression of your countenance, a seductive charm which more forcibly penetrated my heart. You changed colour at the reiterated denial of my domestic; you seemed to me to hesitate, and at that moment you triumphed over all my resolutions. I rushed out of my chamber to run to you, to throw myself at your feet before all present, and to ask pardon of you for ever dreaming of opposition to your will. I felt a generous transport; it appeared to me that I was going to devote myself to virtue, by yielding to my passion for you. I was overwhelmed with that pity inspired by love, which is the most irresistible emotion of the soul. Every other idea disappeared.

I met Madame d'Artenas as I descended the stairs in this transport of enthusiasm. "Why!" said she, "what are you

about?" At this question I blushed extremely for my conduct. "I am going to send off a letter," said I—and supported by her presence, and by the reflections which had sprung up in a moment in my mind, I gave orders to a servant to deliver you my letter, and to request of you to return to your own house to read it.

It was at this moment that I felt how much greater the danger of your presence was, than I had ever apprehended! Never had your presence before produced in me such agitation. I trembled, I grew pale, and if I had heard your voice; if you had spoken to me, I should have been totally incapable of supporting myself. The appearance of a supernatural being, affecting the heart at once with enchantment and terror, would not have so forcibly conveyed the idea of what were my feelings, when your eyes were raised to the window, as if to implore a mitigation of my cruelty; when before my house, so long unfrequented, I beheld him whose absence I had so long deplored. Leonce! I have quitted that house which you have rendered for ever dear to me. I quitted it at the moment when it became indispensable. If you had returned all would have been over; I could not have departed. After this declaration, which I cannot make without feeling a certain degree of self-condemnation, will you still harbour resentment against me? Shall I inspire you with the bitter feelings with which you have threatened me? Will you not at length permit me to go into Languedoc? I am concealed in a place where you cannot possibly discover me, and I only wait to set out on my journey for your promise that you will not pursue me. Leonce, sacrificing, as I do, my destiny to the happiness of Matilda, do you wish that any terrible disaster should poison her enjoyments without uniting me to you?

Yes, Leonce, your duty and mine requires of us not to render Matilda unhappy. Morality, which in all cases forbids us rendering others miserable, ought to triumph over all the doubts of reason, and all the weaknesses of the heart. The more I suffer myself, the more am I afraid of giving others pain; and my sympathy for the sufferings of others increases with the magnitude of my own misfortunes. Do not avail yourself of this sentiment, Leonce, to reproach me with your sorrows; your sufferings, Leonce, are mine. I cannot so far deceive my conscience as to persuade myself, that kindness, the most affectionate, does not command me to afflict you; it is to my passions I ought to yield, for the purpose of consoling you. Nothing shall I ever do for you which is not inspired by love.

Leonce, why should I conceal it from you; after the confession I have made, it would be in vain to attempt concealment. If in my acquaintance with you I had compromised no one but myself; if I had only destroyed my reputation, and

that inward satisfaction which at once constituted my happiness and my glory, I should have given up my lot to all the misfortunes attendant on a criminal sentiment; I would have renounced all that *fiercé* which was so conspicuous in my character before I knew you; I would, regardless of the consequences, return to you, and the happiness of seeing you would have upheld me in life, or supported me even amidst the horrors of dissolution. But the fate of another is involved, and even love itself shall not triumph in my heart over the bitter remorse which would prey on me, if I were capable of sacrificing Matilda to my happiness. To her dying mother I promised to protect her, and however criminal the unhappy Sophia was, this promise was consoling to her spirit in her departing moments. Who is it that can absolve those guilty of crimes to the dead? What voice is there that would pronounce their pardon?

Matilda herself—was she not the companion of my infancy? Am I not bound to protect her by the ties of blood? Shall I tear her from you who are her natural protector? At the age of eighteen shall I blast all her future prospects of felicity? No, Leonce; bestow on Matilda all that is requisite to her happiness; your time, and those little attentions which sweeten domestic life. She is ignorant of your attachment to me; she may remain ignorant of it for ever. This idea will, I trust, calm my spirit in those moments of despair, of which at all times I cannot ward off the approach. Leonce, you will one day be happy in the indulgence of domestic affections; you will not forget, that, to secure to you the happiness arising from these domestic ties, I have given up all, and you will mingle a tender recollection of me with your purest enjoyments!

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## LETTER XXI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

You have quitted your house; you have quitted it in order to avoid me. I am unable to trace your steps. Every where like a person deprived of his senses I search, where there seems any hope of your being found. No; it cannot be virtue, which can suggest such conduct; it can only be the effect of insensibility. Of what advantage will it be to me to paint to you my griefs? You have done all in your power to drive me to despair. In the mean time summon up all the fortitude you possess, for I will now put it to the severest trial, and if there is any thing of goodness, or of tenderness in your nature, your



resolution will cost you dear. I have been at Bellerive, at Cervay at the house of Madame de Lebensei. She protested to me with an air of the greatest sincerity, that she was ignorant where you were at this time. I returned and discovered your valet de chambre, Anthony. Shall I disclose to you what I have done to be put in possession of your secret? I believe that he knows it, for he almost promised to get this letter conveyed to you to-morrow, but nothing could induce him to violate his fidelity. During the remainder of the day, I walked wrapped up in my great coat up and down your street, or in the streets adjoining to it. My object was to watch the steps of Anthony. Unhappy wretch that I am! induced to employ means of the most disgraceful kind, to obtain from you, who pretend to love me, a favour which you ought not to refuse to the basest of mankind.

Every time I perceived a female at a distance, who could create a momentary illusion, I approached with an air the most mournful, till I discovered that she was unworthy of attracting my attention, even for a moment.

I experienced a feeling of misanthropy against every creature who passed me, who had the appearance of being active in the pursuit of his private affairs, who passed by me without particular observation, without noticing my misery.

In the evening, no longer afraid of being recognised, I rested myself on a bench near your door, where I was exposed to the snow which fell yesterday; but even the mournful pleasure of abandoning myself to my reflections, was not granted me. I listened to, and observed with the profoundest attention, whatever passed near your house. I got up every moment, imagining that I saw Anthony, who anxiously avoided me: but when I had proceeded a few steps, I hastily returned, thinking that it was on the opposite side I was most likely to find what I was so eagerly wishing to discover. The hours rolled on, but I continued alone in the streets; every moment it became more improbable, that in the middle of the night I should collect any intelligence, but as often as I had resolved to depart, I was seized with so lively a desire of remaining on the spot, that I considered it as a sort of presentiment, and though twenty times deceived, I yielded to the agitation of my heart, as to an intimation from the world of spirits. At length the day dawned. For the purpose of writing to you, I have employed a room facing your house. At this moment I am leaning on the window which commands a prospect of your gate, and my eyes cannot for two moments together be fixed on the paper. If I pass other twenty-four hours in this situation, I shall hate you—Yes, the angels would be hateful if they condemned mortals to the woes which you have doomed me to suffer. This punishment effects a total change in my character, in my love, nay, even in my morality itself. If you pro-

long this situation, do you reflect who will be the greatest sufferer by my misery? Matilda: yes, it will be Matilda to whom you sacrifice me. I would have continued my attentions to her, if you had still continued to love me; if you had still suffered me to behold you. But I detest in her the sacrifice which you make to her of my destiny. I regard her as the idol before whom you have determined to sacrifice me, and at least I have the consolation of thinking that your virtues, obstinate as they are imprudent, will only injure the fate of us all.

If you conceal from me where you are; if you continue to refuse to see me, my resolution is taken, and you know that I am capable of any degree of firmness. I will reveal to Matilda by what a series of falsehoods our marriage was accomplished; and after telling her that in my heart I regard it as null, I will give up to her the half of my fortune. She will continue to retain my name, and I will see her no more. I will pass the remainder of my life with my mother in Spain, and she to whom you have thought it proper to devote me will never again hear of me till my death. What signifies to me what the world says on the score of duty. Do not torments destroy the obligation of these duties. When a fever has seized an individual, no duty is exacted of him. He is left to struggle against pain, and all the ordinary relations of life are suspended. Have I not also my fits of delirium? Can any thing at these times be expected from me? One idea, one sensation, engrosses my whole soul. Speak to me only of seeing you again, and I will listen to you with eagerness; your virtues will again resume their empire over my heart. But deprive me of this hope, and who shall make me renounce the projects I have formed? No one can ever effect so important a change in my feelings; and you above all, my Delphine, why do you offer me your counsel to alleviate that misery which you yourself create? It is the last degree of insult to act at first the part of an assassin, and then to offer to heal up the wounds which cruelty had inflicted.

Every thing is now fixed: I will inform Matilda, by letter, of the circumstances of our marriage, of my attachment to you, and of the determination I have formed to live apart from her. In twenty-four hours she shall know all if you do not write me that your resolutions are changed, or even if you return no answer to this letter. What my letter will contain, I have informed you, and my determination is irrevocable. If the words I pronounce are bitter, you know who has dictated them, and if I plant daggers in the heart of Matilda, it is not my agitated hand that will be blamed, it will be the *sang froid*, it will be the despotic obstinacy which you display to render me incapable of all sober reflection.

## LETTER XXII.

## ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

You believed that you had alarmed me by your unworthy threat. Since I have known you, I have once only felt resentment against you, and that was after the perusal of your letter. For a few moments I was almost inclined to believe you capable of doing what you menaced, and I thought of you without emotion, for I had ceased to esteem you.

Leonce, this interval of cruel tranquillity lasted but for a moment: I blushed at the idea of believing you capable of an action the most cruel, and the most immoral, that ever was perpetrated by man. You, Leonce! you will condemn to the most cruel state of unprotected solitude, a woman, virtuous as is Matilda. She has but lost a mother, and you will deprive her of a husband; you will leave her, you say, your name and your fortune, that is to say, you will act in such a manner as to escape the reproaches of the world, which judges so very differently of the duties of husbands, and of wives. But what, in reality, will you do for Matilda? Have you reflected on the misery of a woman with whom every connexion of nature is broken? Do you know that by the dependence of our lot, and the weakness of our hearts, we are unfitted to proceed alone in the rugged journey of life? Matilda is very religious, but her reason requires a guide. If she possessed not a single affection upon earth, disappointment raising her devotion already superstitious, would carry it to a pitch of fanatical enthusiasm, the effects of which it is impossible to anticipate. Of what crime can you charge her, that you have resolved to inflict on her so severe a punishment. Her mother esteemed her so much, that she would not even confide to her those arts which had increased her own consideration in the world. Matilda saw and loved you. She knew that you was destined to be her husband, and she thought she was performing a duty when she gave herself up to the attachment which you had inspired. And I, just Heaven! I who know so well what anguish the loss of you must occasion! Shall I be the means of making Matilda suffer the most pungent of all griefs? For do not deceive yourself Leonce; if you were to be guilty of the action which you threaten, I myself would become your accuser, not because I had refused to see you, not for having endeavoured to triumph over my weakness, but for having permitted you to read the sentiments of that heart which ought to

have closed for ever, the moment you were no longer master of yourself. I would accuse myself for having inspired a sentiment, which far from rendering the object of my attachment more virtuous, proved the destruction of his goodness. Leonce! is it thus that we are formed to love each other? Ought not this sentiment, which I believe will never be eradicated, to have a powerful influence in raising our souls to perfection. Oh! what is there in love without enthusiasm? And can enthusiasm exist, unless respect for moral ideas, in some degree, mixes with our sentiments of the object of affection? If I ceased to esteem your character, what, Leonce, would you be to me? The most amiable and the most seductive of men; but it is not by these charms alone, that my heart has been subdued. What decided my fate was that your good qualities, nay even your very faults, appeared to me to belong to a soul full of nobleness and dignity. In all of them I recognised the passion of honour exaggerated, if that be possible, but inseparable in my opinion from genuine virtue. I believed that you set more value on your own approbation, than the opinions of the world. Never was a generous or feeling expression employed before you, without exciting in your bosom a corresponding emotion. Never have you heard of a benevolent action, without speaking of it with that warmth and animation which characterize a superior mind. Do you wish then to renounce every thing in your character that gave birth to my attachment?

At the moment when I am condemning myself to the most cruel sacrifice, which duty can exact, the idea which I had formed of your character, sustains and animates my resolution; I suffer, to prove myself still more worthy of your esteem. Perhaps this motive has a still stronger dominion over me, than I had supposed. You would, I know, Leonce, sacrifice love and all its enjoyments to the opinion of the world, and what would you think of me, if God and my conscience had less power over my conduct, than a regard to public opinion has over yours? I have only a few struggles more to undergo to ensure victory, I have to regulate my feelings, to escape the torments of remorse. If in spite of my sincerest efforts, you succeed in overcoming my resolution, nothing but endless sufferings will await us. My reputation will be blasted, and perhaps you will then love me less. Just Heaven! can any thing be imagined to equal my punishment. The sacrifices I should have made to your love, would degrade me even in your eyes. And how could it be ascertained, that an opportunity would be given of rekindling your affection by a desperate action, and of securing to my memory that pure and lively recollection which the censure of the world had sullied.

Numberless fears and reflections, Leonce, press on my mind, and struggle against the sentiment which attaches me

to you. Ah! what pains do we but feel in tearing ourselves from our Supreme bliss. I am unable to explain to you the causes of that terror, which seizes me as often as I think of yielding to your wishes. It is the probation of Heaven which inspires me with this salutary dread. Perhaps the soul of a departed friend, makes a last effort to save me, and watches over my happiness, though my senses cannot recognise his countenance, or listen to his words.

Leonce, if I have ceased to speak to you of Matilda, about whom I was just now solely occupied, it is because I am no longer afraid of the project, which the agitation of a moment had suggested. I do not require your answer to be assured that you have renounced it for ever. I know not in what part of this letter, I at once perceived the certain conviction with which I was impressed, but this impression cannot deceive me, O Leonce! we are not yet for ever separated. My own emotions teach me what you feel. There remains in my heart an intelligence, a communication of an indescribable nature, which reveals to me all your thoughts.

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## LETTER XXIII.

### LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Yes, I will obey you; it is impossible for me to deny that you are in the right. I yield to the force of truth, since it is you who disclose it. Shall I not have the power of persuading you on my part.

It is impossible that you should conduct yourself with such cruelty towards me. If I shall succeed in convincing you that the most rigid virtue would permit, nay even command you to yield to my prayers. I know not if in the delirium of a fever, I had conceived the hope, that you would be the wife of my choice, that you pronounced the solemn vow, which was to unite us together: I know not whether, on that fatal day, if I had seized hold of your hand, you would have stretched it out to me, and that I could have presented it to the benediction of Heaven; but now I can take honour and love to witness, that I now demand no other tie, but what is pure as your own heart! a tie without which I could neither exercise virtue, nor promote the happiness of any other being.

You order me to continue to live with Matilda. I will obey: but will not the spectacle of my despair, sooner or later triumph over every resolution? If your depriving me of the emulation of pleasing; if frequent conversation with you do not

reanimate my drooping spirits; and do not give me the free exercise of the qualities and talents which from nature I probably possess, but which, without you, will never be called into exercise, what shall constitute my employment in life? In what single point of view shall I be distinguished from the lowest of mankind? How shall I ever enter on any glorious career, whatever be its nature? No interest, no spontaneous emotion, will point out to me a field of exertion! And far from acting under the influence of ambition, I will go through the duties of life like a ghost walking in the midst of animated beings.

Can I cultivate my mind when it has become incapable of regular thoughts? When it collects every idea with labour; when I cannot even form a conception, or perform an action without first obtaining a victory over my predominating feelings. What is the career which can be pursued, or what the reputation which can be acquired, by continual efforts? When nature inspires nothing but sorrow, what is there great or good which can be effected? A splendid reverse of fortune may give new fervour to a high-spirited character; but continual chagrin is the poison of every virtue and of every talent. The energies of the soul are entirely annihilated by the continued operation of sorrow.

You believe that I should be capable of performing my domestic duties, if you tear from me the enjoyments which I wished to find in your friendship. But do you consider that these are constant and pleasing duties, the exercise of which requires a certain degree of calmness which a moderate share of happiness alone, can bestow. Yes, Delphine, to you I would owe this tranquillity. Your enchanting figure, often inflames and agitates my heart; but from the superiority of your understanding, and the delicacy of your wit, I taste the purest and most tranquil delights. When at Madame de Vernon's, I heard you talk of virtue and of reason; when I heard you analyze ideas the most profound, and explain relations the most delicate; I felt myself enlightened and instructed. I comprehend more clearly the end of my existence, and I reflected with pleasure on the useful direction which I could give to my thoughts. Oh, Love! where thou inspirest and ennoblest the soul, when thou callest into action the power of genius and advancest the character of thy votaries to perfection; it is then only that thy power is fully experienced. It is there that thy influence is exerted for the perfection of human happiness, and not the increase of human misery. Since I have ceased to see you, I have felt myself degraded. I no longer do any thing of myself. With melancholy I compare the sorrows that await me with those which may yet be in store. I strive to divert my uneasiness by turning my thoughts to a thousand insignificant objects: and I frequently think that death would

be far preferable to an eternal struggle to fly from the sufferings of life.

Delphine, these are not the ordinary pains of an unhappy lover, those pains over which time, absence, and reason, may triumph. My soul feels at all times a constant want, too imperious to be controlled. Your countenance would not so far enchant me by its indescribable charms. Youth would not so far render your interesting figure alluring, but that I should continue to retain for you sentiments at once the most tender and the most pure. Your expressions have such empire over me, that after having listened to you I never can love another woman.

Ah! my friend, do you not perceive it as well as myself? The world has fatigued itself for ages with talking of love; but it is once only in many thousand chances that two beings are perfectly suited to each other in all the faculties of the heart, and understanding. They are never happy but when together, never animated but when conversing with each other. Nature has been unwilling to give them any thing but by halves; the very thought of the one is not completed but by that of the other.

If this is our situation, my Delphine, what absurd attempts would you make! you would return to me in a few years if I lived—if we live, you would return to me, being no longer able to struggle against the destiny of the heart; but then we shall have nothing left but minds depressed by too long a period of misfortune. We shall no longer have strength to relieve ourselves, and to bear, without sinking under it, that mass of affliction which nature causes to press upon the close of life.

Delphine! Delphine! believe me, when I swear to you, that I will respect all the duties, all the virtues, which you enjoin me: after such an oath you have no right to refuse me. You speak of your weakness; you pretend to fear it. Ah! cruel woman! how much you deceive yourself. But at length you would say with truth, that I, the lover who adores you, will preserve you if your heart places its confidence in mine; I will respect your virtue, your celestial delicacy, every thing which constitutes you an angel of angels! I am anxious that your image should remain, in every respect, the same as that which now fills my heart; and the slightest alteration in your qualities would inflict a pang which not all the enjoyments of love could compensate.

You protect Matilda; I will be particularly attentive to her happiness. You know her character, her mode of life, the nature of her mind; you know how easy it is to conceal from her what is passing in the world, and even immediately around her. I shall make her happier by the cares which I shall imagine I owe her, in compensation for the happiness which I

shall enjoy without her. I shall make her happier by thus repairing the wrongs of which she may be ignorant, than if broken-hearted, I should be content to drag on for a still longer period, at a distance from you a life of despair. Delphine, every thing is provided for; I have answered every objection; your heart has no remaining defence; my innocent prayer cannot be refused.

Would you condemn me to repel a suspicion of which you give me a hint? You have a right to upbraid me with my faults, after the unfortunate situation into which they have precipitated me; but ought you likewise to tell me that I would love you with less ardour were your reputation impaired, and that too by your very condescension for my happiness? My friend, banish far from you those fears which are unworthy of both of us. Permit me to pass one hour a day with you; the happiness of that hour will shed its influence over all the rest of my life. I shall expect it; I shall retain the remembrance of it; and my blood as it circulates in my veins, will no longer occasion that burning pain which I now feel. I shall be able to think, act, do good to others, perform the duties of my life, and die lamented by you.

I set out to leave this letter at your gate. Hope reanimates my heart: if you have spoken truth, Delphine, if our hearts still sympathize, this hope is a new presage of your answer.

Eleven at Night.

I have reached your house, and I learn that you have set off.—Set off! and I am not to be informed what road you have taken! what do they expect, who persist in preserving this barbarous silence! Do they imagine that there is a spot on the earth where I shall not find you? Should this letter reach you before I shall, prepare your heart—your heart, hard as it may be—to suffer considerable pain: for though I have reason to believe you will prove inflexible at present, yet there are fatal events, which you cannot witness without horror. Adieu, I rest no more until I have met death, or you.

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## LETTER XXIV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, December 14, 1790.

I REMAIN, my dear Louisa! This expression is, perhaps, very culpable, but if you forgive it, all that I have to say to you will tend only to justify my conduct.



You know what was my situation, when I forbade him to see me. I thought my sorrow the most culpable and the most dangerous affliction. Now, that I have resolved no longer to abandon him, I am calm, and have no more fears; all that I wished for was to see him, and to talk with him. I do not even entertain any other wish, now that I am assured of happiness. I am certain of passing in this manner all my youthful years, without having to combat even a single criminal emotion. I will be his friend; to him shall all the feelings of my heart be consecrated; but this union shall never inspire us, but with the noblest of virtues.

Louisa, in parting with him, I struggled against nature and moral duty. I wished to triumph over the horror which I felt at the idea of giving him pain. I must, therefore, have been incessantly agitated with the most heart-rending uncertainty. Unable to decide whether I was virtuous or criminal, barbarous or generous; every thing was confused in my mind. I think I now comprehend what my duties exact, and I will consult them. I may not, perhaps, be able to preserve what the world calls existence and reputation. But for what reward do you think I expose them to danger? for that of seeing him, and of seeing him without remorse! Let my enemies devise at their pleasure, calumnies, persecutions, and pains; they can invent nothing which I shall not despise in the bosom of such happiness. Love, such as I feel, leaves me nothing to fear but guilt or death. The rest of the evils of life appear to me only like those distant and fleeting mists, which scarcely for an instant, fix our attention.

I must describe to you, my sister, the scene, at once terrible and pleasing, which decided my fate. Madame d'Artenas being a witness, contrary to my wishes, of my refusal to see my friend, and of the pain which I felt upon the occasion, became mistress of my secret, and conducted me to her house, unknown to Leonce, for the purpose of concealing me from his inquiries. I was convinced from his letters, that I could never bring him to promise that he would not follow me. Fearing every moment, lest he should discover my retreat, I resolved to set off, and to take a circuitous route in order to regain the road to the South. The very evening on which I wrote to you, my resolution was taken and carried into execution. In this grand effort, I conceive that I was supported by the fever induced by solitude and grief. I was animated by a forced enthusiasm, and was so eager to accomplish my cruel sacrifice, that I seated myself in my carriage in a quarter of an hour after I had determined upon going. I left Anthony at Paris, in order to arrange my affairs, and taking with me my chamber-maid only, I set off in a condition, resembling much more the extravagance of delirium, than the triumph of reason.

The night was dark and extremely cold. I had my handkerchief about my head, and throwing myself back in the carriage, was conveyed along for three hours, without once changing my position. Stupified by the rapidity of my progress, I attended to no particular idea, but banished all as they arose in succession. Nevertheless, it was in vain, that in the midst of my agitation, I endeavoured to confound the recollections and regrets which presented themselves to my view; I succeeded in obscuring what was passing in my mind, but nothing could appease my sorrow. I should imagine that my state of mind at that period, bore some resemblance to that of those unhappy criminals who have received sentence of death, and who not having force enough to look their fate in the face, endeavour to extinguish in their minds every power of reflection.

The frosty air, against which I had not sufficiently guarded myself, gave me, from time to time, some very painful sensations; and what I suffered in this respect was of some advantage to me. I sometimes stopped my mouth with my handkerchief, so as, for a moment, to deprive myself of the power of respiration, in order to banish by another species of pain, that reflection which I dreaded as a persecuting phantom. I know not what would have become of me, when, after my vain efforts to escape from my own thoughts, I should have begun to meditate in all its consequences, upon the fate to which I had doomed myself. But I had reached in my opinion, that extremity of misery, which calls down to our assistance the interposition of divine clemency.

An event, which, at least from its impression on my mind, I might term supernatural, suddenly changed my condition, and rescued me from the pangs of despair. I heard my postillions crying out—"Why do you stop us?" "Who are you?" "Get out of the way, this instant, get out of the way."—I at first imagined that some robbers had taken advantage of the night, in order to attack us, and, though you know me to be sufficiently timid, the idea gave me almost an emotion of satisfaction. It seemed to me, that God in pity for my sufferings, had sent death to my relief. I precipitately thrust out my head at the door of the carriage, eager to encounter whatever danger should deliver me from the impressions to which I was then a prey.

I could discern nothing, but heard a voice, which from the first moment it struck me, has never been effaced from my heart, pronouncing these words:—"Drive on, if you choose; crush me in pieces; but I will not get out of your way."—"Stop!" exclaimed I, "stop!"—The postillions did not distinctly hear me, and I imagined that they were preparing to drive over the body of the person who had placed himself in their way. I made several efforts to open the door, but my hands were seized with so violent a tremor, that I could not

accomplish my purpose ; and this tremor increased with every moment, which it made me lose. I was convinced that if I did not get out, the postillions not comprehending my intentions, would attribute my cries to terror, and taking Leonce for an assassin, might instantly crush him under the horses' feet, and the wheels of my carriage. No! never can language depict the pain which I then suffered ! At length I darted out of the fatal door : Leonce, who had heard me speak, threw himself off his horse, and running towards me, received me in his arms.

God of justice! what more will you do for virtue? What rewards have you treasured up for in heaven, when, on earth, you have given us the blessing of love? I recovered him the very day that I doomed myself to quit him for ever. My heart was identified with his, at the moment when I expected to feel the carriage which conveyed me, rise up as it passed over his body. No—I should have no claim to sensibility or sincerity, if I had not that instant resolved to devote my life to him, whose presence has given me such delicious transports. Ah! who could plunge him a second time into despair, when accidentally rescued from it? Who could voluntarily precipitate himself into the abyss, and become again a prey to all those painful sensations that are suspended and effaced by the confidence which happiness so suddenly inspires? No—I dare affirm, that the human heart is not endowed with force enough to adopt such a resolution.

Leonce carried me a few steps in his arms, conceiving that I had fainted away, though I had not. I had retained the consciousness of existence, in order to enjoy that instant, marked, perhaps, by heaven, as the extreme and highest degree of felicity, which it has destined me to receive. The first words which I spoke to Leonce, were to promise that I had renounced my project of departure. My departure was henceforth impossible, and I did not wish to keep him in suspense for a moment, after my decision was taken. Ah! Louisa, what gratitude did he express to me! what a delicious sensation do we derive from the happiness of the object of our love! An indescribable terror, created by imagination, had disturbed and alarmed my mind for a fortnight before. Why then did I wish to separate myself from Leonce? Are there not sisters who pass their lives in affectionate intercourse with their brothers? Are there not men whose friendship honours and consoles the most respectable women? Why should I esteem myself so little as to suppose I am incapable of purifying all the sentiments of my heart, and of enjoying at once affection and virtue?

When Leonce found I was resolved not to separate from him, the most agreeable intercourse began to take place between us. He gave orders for every thing necessary to be done with a grace which charmed me. He placed my *femme-de-cham-*

bre in Antoine's cabriolet, which had joined us, and paid attention to every detail with the most amiable vivacity, as if he believed that he was regulating all the interests of my life.

After having placed me in my carriage, he testified, by a thousand delicate attentions, his anxiety respecting the shivering tremor I had experienced. He wrapped me in his cloak, opened and shut the windows several times, and used every endeavour to render me more comfortable. I observed in him the activity of happiness, and an impossibility of repressing his joy, which made me give way to a most enchanting reverie. I was silent because he spoke. I was calm because the expression of his sentiments was ardent. Oh! Louisa, nobody, no living being, knowing what this felicity is, would even renounce its enjoyment!

It was agreed between Leonce and me, that I should say on my return to Paris, that I had been seized with a fever on my journey, and that the indisposition obliged me to come back. I listened to his projects for enabling us to see each other every day without giving the least uneasiness to Matilda. They were such as I would have chosen myself. He also frequently recurred to the means he would take to prevent any injury being done to my reputation. "Leonce," replied I, "henceforth do nothing for me which is not necessary for yourself; I am, at present, only a being, who lives for him she loves, and existing only in the interest, and the glory of the object of her affection. While you continue to love me, you will do enough for my happiness: my self-love, my inclinations, and my desires are all swallowed up in my attachment to you. Do not then agitate either my conscience or my love, but decide on my life in every other respect as you please. I place myself with pride and with joy in absolute dependence on your will."

Oh, Louisa! with what passion, with what transport did Leonce thank me! Your happy Delphine heard, during three hours, the most tender love depicted in the most eloquent language. Leonce, I am certain, never for a moment entertained the idea of an expression or look which could displease me. When the heart is good!—When it is pure!—When it is enthusiastic! it is happy!

When we reached home, I found the last letter which Leonce had written to me, and which I had not received. It seemed to me that it would have been sufficient to have changed my resolution; but how delightful was it to read this letter together! Leonce's expressions of sorrow made me still more enjoy his present happiness, and I took a pleasure in making him repeat the prayers he had addressed to me, in order that my heart might be touched with them a second time: but at last I perceived it was three in the morning. The moment I spoke Leonce obeyed, and left me to return to his own house.

I had wanted rest for several months, but I slept soundly

the remainder of this night. When I awoke, the beams of a beautiful winter sun enlightened my chamber: Phœbus had selected the finest of his rays to shed a lustre on my happiness. I spent a long time in prayer to God; there was nothing in my heart which I feared to disclose to him. After prayer I sat down to write to you; our sentiments have always been so similar, that I have reason to hope, my dear sister, you will not condemn me. How is it possible that I should be satisfied with my conduct, and that you should think it blameable? However, Louisa, do not delay to answer me.—Adieu!

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## LETTER XXV.

### LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

BE our future destiny what it may, my love, we have to thank Heaven for giving us life. Let your mind repose on the day which has just elapsed. It forms a luminous point in the period of our existence, to which we shall never fail to look back with joy, whatever be the situation in which fate may place us.

From my infancy a strong and habitual presentiment has always impressed me with the persuasion that I shall die a violent death. This morning the same idea recurred to me, combined with the most delightful feelings; but it had assumed a new character. The presage no longer alarmed me; I wished not to discourage it; I now see life only in love; I am happy in reflecting that if I die in youth, by any of those events which menace a character such as mine, I shall perish in the ardour of my passion for you, and long before age can damp the feelings of my heart.

Tell me, Delphine, why the thought of death infuses a kind of charm into the transports of love? Do these transports bring us to the limits of existence? It is because we experience in ourselves emotions which are more powerful than the human organs—emotions which make the soul wish to break its bonds, to unite, to confound more intimately with the object itself? Ah! Delphine, how happy am I in being moved by the tenderest feelings of affection! my eyes constantly filled with tears, my plaintive voice, my slow and distracted pace, may give me, perhaps, the appearance of one of the weakest of beings. My character, however, has lost nothing of its force; but this extraordinary state is produced by an inexhaustible source of exquisite impressions, which diffuse themselves over my whole soul. Yesterday the air oppressed my breast: this morning I breathe only love and happiness. Ah!

how much do I now love life! Every movement, every thought which reminds me of existence, is a pleasure which I wish to prolong: I would arrest the progress of time as a benefactor.

Delphine, we shall one day be unhappy, for such is the will of Fate: but we never shall have reason to complain. I have felt your heart beat against mine; your arms have enfolded me with all the warmth of affection. Those pains, those inquietudes, those doubts which inwardly oppress us, and secretly unhinge our best sentiments, all the moral infirmities of our nature have suddenly vanished from my mind. I am become free, generous, bold, eloquent. Were it at this moment required of me to astonish mankind by the most intrepid courage, or to move them by the most impassioned language, I am capable of the task. I am worthy to undertake it, and no mortal being would equal your happy lover. By this enthusiasm of love, which you alone could inspire, I shall be able to avoid the intoxication your beauty would produce. But if at any time that effort should be difficult, remind me of my own confession, that yesterday my happiness was completed.

I shall visit you this evening, Delphine; I can see you without the least inconvenience. Every thing is arranged; every difficulty is removed; the slightest circumstances second my wishes. I am favoured by heaven on your account. You shall instruct me in your religion; that is a subject I have not yet considered; but as I am so happy, it is proper I should know where to offer up my gratitude! The devotion I render you is not sufficient; I must know to whom I am indebted for my life; by whom it was, and by whom it is preserved? What sacrifices can be required of me? What punishments imposed upon me? There are no longer any in the world! How shall I discover any duties, the performance of which would be painful, or any actions for which I ought to be rewarded, when I am completely blest by your presence? Oh! Delphine—tranquillize me, if it be possible, respecting the excess of my passion, and its duration. Tell me, that Heaven has permitted you to give me a destiny that was not intended for other men. I can hope for every thing; I can believe in every thing! What miracles would astonish me, when a moment has changed all nature to my eyes!

I possess this felicity, and death alone can terminate it. There will be no more of those terrible days on which I cannot behold you, my love. I am no longer capable of conceiving or enduring that evil. I have lost in a moment all power over my soul. Happiness is become my habit and my right. I must watch over myself with much more attention than during the continuance of my despair. I am happy, but my whole being has been convulsed, and the palpitations of my heart are most rapid. My bosom is animated by a kind of tremulous life, which the slightest pain would instantly extinguish. Oh!

Delphine—perfect happiness is too great for human nature. My brain is disturbed, and now that I possess every wish of my heart, I am in danger of being rendered wretched by superstition.

Adieu! Delphine, adieu!—in vain do I attempt to express all my feelings. Strong passions, possession, ardour, an intensity, the secret of which is only known to the soul, that surest indication of celestial sympathy, love, will best explain to you what I feel.

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## LETTER XXVI.

MADemoiselle D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, December 20.

SINCE you are happy, my dear Delphine, I am convinced that you entertain no thought, no wish, which the most perfect virtue would not approve: But alas! you know not all the perils of your situation. Why am I compelled by the duties of friendship, to refuse to participate in the first expression of joy you have intrusted to me for these six months.

I do not ask you, that which can no longer be obtained. On perusing your impassioned letter, I am convinced that you are no longer capable of making the great sacrifice, for which you have so long courageously struggled; but at least reflect on the troubles that menace you, in order that a salutary fear may still, if possible, be for your guide.

You believe that Leonce will never ask you to renounce those principles of virtue, without which, such a soul as yours can know no happiness. I am convinced that at this moment his heart is satisfied by an unexpected benefit; but if you cannot bear to see him unhappy, do you not reflect that he may use his powerful influence in such a manner as to render it the torment of your life! you will triumph, I believe; but have you calculated the pain you must sustain in the contest?

Though you should succeed in directing the sentiments of Leonce in his relations with you, can you forget his character? At present, indeed, he does not recollect it himself, he is only alive to love; but do you not know that the defects which are interwoven with our nature, and connected with all the habits of our life, become always prominent, whenever any circumstances offend them: you say you abandon the care of your reputation, and that it will be sufficient for you to watch the rectitude of your conduct. If it should happen, as happen it certainly will, that you become suspected and blamed for your intimacy with Leonce, he will suffer himself greatly for the

injury done you, and you will perhaps experience with regret, the return of his irritability on every thing relating to opinion.

In a word, can you flatter yourself, that with all your care, you will be able to prevent Matilda from discovering the passion with which you have inspired Leonce? Do you believe she would be happy on learning that she was indebted to you, even for the attentions of her husband, and that his conduct towards her, depended entirely on your will?

I repeat it, I would not give you that rigorous advice which would now be useless; but consider that in a state of happiness, it is easy to fortify one's reason.

I require nothing from the unfortunate; it is enough for them to support life. But it is not so with you, Delphine. You enjoy at present a situation which enchants you. This is the moment, therefore, which must be embraced, in order to accustom you by reflection, to support a future situation, which, alas! is but too probable! It gives me pain to tell you so; but I have never seen a single example of happiness and virtue in that kind of intercourse which you propose. You may afford an example of virtue, but not of happiness. Circumstances which can be foreseen, and circumstances which cannot equally be anticipated, contribute to the dissolution of ties which are held too dear, and yet are not sufficiently secured. Society being entirely formed upon principles, incompatible with connexions purely voluntary, it presses upon them with its utmost force, and eventually never fails to burst them asunder. The remainder of our years is then consumed by anticipation; there is no longer any relish for those common interests and simple pleasures, which enable us to glide gently down the stream which Providence has marked out to us in the current of life. We have known, we have experienced that animated existence which results from passioned feelings, and we are no longer accessible to the ordinary enjoyments of our being. Reason may supply us with strength to support misfortune, but reason can never create a single pleasure; and when love has preyed upon the heart, nothing short of a miracle can convert it into a source of gentle and tranquil enjoyment.

Oh! Delphine, poor Delphine, you sacrifice every thing to a few years, perhaps to a much shorter period! I entreat you to regard this place as an asylum. Do not renounce your intention of coming; add not imprudence and a blind security to all the feelings which already detain you in captivity. Repose yourself for a moment, in the lap of happiness; but let it be for the purpose of recovering strength to proceed in the journey of life. Alas! your sufferings are not yet past; do not shake off the ties which sustained you; all these ties, which are much more frequently a support than a restraint, you will find but too necessary. We have often agreed, my friend, in



remarking that society, perhaps Providence itself, has granted to the female sex but one species of happiness,—*connubial love*; and when this is taken away, it is as impossible to repair the loss, as to regain youth, beauty, and life,—all of them the immediate gifts of nature, and dispensed by nature alone.

It is painful, I am well aware, to reflect that happiness is for ever fled; but it would be still more painful to deceive one's self as to this truth; and in particular situations hope is a great evil, as it tends to prevent that repose which would result from necessity. Delphine, friendship should reserve its weaknesses for the moment of suffering, in the midst of prosperity it must assume a severer tone.

I have alluded only to the pains which immediately attach to the feeling in which you indulge; I have not allowed myself to fear, that you will become a prey to the greatest of all miseries—Remorse. Ah! you have already experienced the most affliction; yet you still know not the full extent of the sufferings of the heart; you would have learnt it, had you been deficient in the performance of your duties. As long as you respect them, my friend, the favour of Heaven may yet protect us.

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## LETTER XXVII.

### LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, Dec. 28.

You are happy, my Delphine, my heart should have nothing more to wish for. It is but a fortnight since I believed not even in the possibility of pain; I thought that it never more would find an entrance into my heart. Yet I am uneasy, and almost melancholy. I wished to conceal my situation; but I felt that I should violate that perfect intimacy which unites our souls, should I permit the slightest secret to lurk in my breast.

I conjure you, Delphine, not to misconstrue what I am going to say to you. It is not feelings repressed, though not subdued, which already disturb my repose: neither is it jealousy which has taken possession of me:—how should such an idea enter my mind? My heart is guarded against its approach by my esteem, by my admiration of you. But I hate this public life in which you again appeared with so much splendour. When I call at your house, I meet with an endless succession of visitors. I am never sure of having a *tête-à-tête* with you for a single moment. Frequently the teasing loun-

gers who think you as a charming creature, continue to talk with you for an hour, when prudence permits me no longer to remain.

Yesterday evening, for instance, I passed four hours with you, and yet, who could suppose it? During those four hours, I experienced nothing but the most painful emotions. Madame d'Artenas importuned you to sup with her; you thought proper to accept the invitation, in order, as you informed me, to prove by the cordiality with which you should be received in the bosom of the best society in Paris, that the impression made by the reports circulated to your injury, was entirely removed: for even you, Delphine, use every effort to captivate the opinion of the world, and you never fail of success. I followed you into this giddy vortex, and had I not been there, I should not have seen you for the whole day.

I arrived before you; you entered, and never did you look so charming! That black habit, over which hung your flaxen tresses, that crape which surrounded your waist, and set off the purest white, in short, the whole of your dress made you dazzle every eye. I heard whispers of admiration on every side, and I know not why I did not feel proud of your success. It seemed to me that you owed your eclat to the desire of pleasing the company, and not to your attachment for me alone. This impression was the first which I received on your entrance, and the remainder of the evening was but too much in unison with this painful feeling.

Never did you produce so much effect by your presence and your conversation! Never did you display a mind more amiable and more attractive! Three ranks of persons of both sexes formed a circle around you, in order to see and hear you. Jealousy and rivalry were for a moment suspended. The spectators, like courtiers, in their deportment to men in power, endeavoured to approach you, without attempting a comparison. Each was proud of comprehending all the magic of your eloquence, and for once, the feelings of self-love contended which should most admire you. As to me, I remained at some distance from you, without, however, losing a syllable of your conversation. I heard also the exclamations of delight, I had almost said of love, uttered by all those who surrounded you. Whilst your wit shone forth with greater freedom and brilliancy than ever, it was impossible for me to join in the conversation. You were full of gaiety, and I was pensive. Yet I also, Delphine, I also was happy. Why, then, was I so embarrassed, so melancholy? Explain to me the cause of this difference. Oh! if you were to discover, that it is because I love you a thousand times more than you love me!

Assuredly the life which is led in Paris cannot accord with love. The affection with which you have condescended to favour me, would be impaired amidst such a variety of impres-

sions. Your heart, I am convinced, is too susceptible to be wearied by self-love from its real attachments. But on the other hand, do not the unexampled triumphs you obtain, the moment you make your appearance, give you some feelings of pleasure? These pleasures are not derived from me; on the contrary, it is these which would console you for my absence. I am proud of your beauty, your understanding, all your charms; yet they make me feel that delicate jealousy, which fastens upon no particular object, but attaches itself to the slightest variations in the workings of the heart. Those admirers who encircle you, seem, in my estimation, to separate us. Those praises which are lavished upon you, give so many others an occasion to mention your name, to talk of you, to pronounce flattering expressions—expressions which I myself have often addressed to you, and which I shall doubtless be forced to repeat.

Oh! my friend, since you never are to be wholly mine, since those charms which fascinate every eye, are never to be ceded to my love; you must forgive my irritability when others see you, hear you, and thus possess almost the same enjoyments as myself. Pardon me, my Delphine, I have committed blasphemy—you do love me—to whom then can I compare myself on the face of the earth? But I cannot enjoy my situation in the midst of the world. The observers who surround us give me uneasiness. I am never completely happy but when alone with you. In every other situation I am in pain, and I feel with additional bitterness the misery of not being your husband. You wish me to be happy. I therefore venture to supplicate your return to Bellerive. The season is still rough, but it is not true, that you will make no account of what might prove disagreeable to other females?

The duties which you enjoin me, with respect to Matilda, do not permit me to see you before seven in the evening. Till that hour you will be frequently alone, but you taste some pleasure in those solitary reflections which deepen every impression on the heart. I request that female who has achieved more numerous conquests, and obtains more extensive homage than any other in France, to shut herself up in a country house, amidst the snows of winter. But this female is susceptible of love; she abandoned every thing in order to shun me, when impelled by an unjustifiable delicacy; and will she not still more willingly abandon every thing, to satisfy my heart, which pants for love, solitude, rapture, all the enjoyments which the world ravishes from the soul, by deadening its sensibility? I detest the hours which are consumed by a life of indolence. During the last six months I have lost the habit of occupation. If agreeable to you, we will devote some portion of our time to reading together; I love this gentle mode of deceiving, if it be possible, the feelings which prey upon my heart.

Religious exercises, and the society of devotees, occupy almost every hour with Madame de Mondeville. She has never asked me to accompany her to the parties which meet at the Bishop of M——'s, and I even think that she would appear somewhat embarrassed in bringing me along with her. She never allows herself to go to the theatre. She starts objections to three-fourths of the ladies with whom we might be on terms of civility to visit. Hence, it very easily happens that I daily become a greater stranger to her society. She loves me, and yet she feels none of the pangs of separation. When the rigorous principles of Popery take possession of a mind, not naturally endowed with much sensibility, they regulate every thing, decide upon every thing, and leave neither sufficient leisure, nor sufficient knowledge of the world, to become susceptible of jealousy. I shall, therefore, give greater pleasure than pain to Matilda, by leaving her at liberty to spend her evenings with persons of her own way of thinking; and provided I do not dine from home, she will be satisfied with my conduct.

Every day, therefore, as soon as it strikes six, I shall mount my horse to go to Bellerive. My life will not commence till that hour; I shall arrive at seven, and return at midnight. Though I might be permitted to sit to a later hour in the societies of Paris, I will be punctual to my time, in order to avoid giving Madame Mondeville any occasion of uneasiness. You perceive, Delphine, with what care I anticipate your generous fears. I shall enjoy life for four hours only, but during the rest of that day I shall have those four hours in perspective, and I shall drag my chain in order to reach them. Oh! my friend, do not oppose this project—I am enchanted with it. I began this letter in the utmost dejection, but in tracing out our plan of life, I have felt my heart revive. I carry you off from the world; I preserve you for myself alone; I do not even leave at your own disposal the moments which I shall pass without seeing you. I am a severe and tyrannical taskmaster, but I love you to such an excess of idolatry, that I can never find fault with you.

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## LETTER XXVIII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

December 29, 1790.

LEONCE, the day after to-morrow, being the first day of the new year, I shall expect you at Bellerive. I love to celebrate with you one of the most interesting epochs of time. They will aid me, I hope, to view back the years of my happiness.

All the solemnities which mark the course of life, give pleasure to him who is happy; but how bitter would be their return, if accompanied only with the remembrance of sorrows!

I was anxious, my friend, that my first expressions should convey my consent to your wishes; but now permit me to tell you, that your letter has given me some pain. How many motives do you give me for the simplest wish? Do you think that I should feel repugnance in quitting the world? Have I any interest, any enjoyment, any object independent of you? What anxiety, what agitation do you, as it were, involuntarily, discover in what you have written to me? I had, a few hours before, received a letter from my sister-in-law, attempting to open my eyes to the dangers to which I am exposed; and already, in some of your ambiguous complaints, I thought I found a presage of the misfortunes with which she threatens me.

What! Leonce, a month has not yet elapsed, since from our absolute separation, a long interval of punishment, we have come to see each other every day; and already your heart is tormented, and conceals from me, perhaps, what it feels, but what it is not permitted to declare. Scarcely have I a sufficient command of my thoughts and my feelings, in order to know and to relish the whole extent of my happiness; while you seem discontented, and complain of your fate. In those familiar conversations which you desire, you never cease to talk to me of your sacrifices. Oh! Leonce, Leonce, are the delights of sentiment exhausted with regard to you? Tell me not that your heart is more impassioned than mine; trust me, that in our situation, the happiest of the two possesses the greater share of sensibility.

I would, nevertheless, wish to persuade myself, that the importunities of the world are the only cause of your displeasure. I will explain the motives which doomed me to support them. I was aware, that for some time, there had been many reports injurious to my character, and I thought it necessary to endeavour to regain the good opinion of those upon whose minds such imputations, however unjust, might have made some impression. Madame d'Artenas thought it proper that I should re-appear in society; and it is from her goodness in (yesterday) assembling at her own house, what are called in Paris, the *leaders of the band* of opinion, that I had an opportunity not of justifying myself, for to that I should not have submitted, but of resuming my rank in a fashionable circle. Need I tell it you, Leonce, it is on your account that I am so solicitous to disarm calumny. I should be insensible to her attacks, did they not affect me through the impression they may make upon you. The secret of my conduct for the last ten days, was, perhaps, the wish of presenting to your view,

her, whom your mother did not think worthy of your hand, surrounded with consideration and respect.

You almost reproach me for my gaiety of disposition. Alas! As I yesterday entered Madame d'Artenas's drawing-room, I, at first, felt an impression of melancholy. I entered the world, for the first time since the death of Madame de Vernon, and you must forgive me for not being able to think of her without tenderness. I was, however, aware of the necessity of concealing this disposition. Had I shown any appearance of melancholy in the midst of the world, far from its being attributed to the affliction which occasioned it, it would have been said that I was uneasy on account of the reports respecting M. de Serbellane and myself, and I should thus have been defeated in my only purpose. One must either entirely fly from the world, or not appear in it but in triumph: the society of Paris is of all societies that, in which pity is most suddenly converted into accusation.

It was, therefore, in consequence of a painful effort, that I entered that successful career, which you take a pleasure in describing with so much bitterness. Yet I must admit that I was animated by the conversation; I was animated—must it be told you?—by the pleasure of shining in your presence. I observed you close to me; I often looked towards you, to divine your opinion; a smile from you convinced me, that I had expressed myself gracefully; and the sensation excited by society, when one enters into all its feelings, was singularly increased by your presence. The emotion which it made me feel, inspired me with thoughts and expressions which gave pleasure to all around me. I addressed myself to you by ambiguous allusions; and on the most general questions I uttered not a single word which had not some relation to you; and a relation which you only could perceive, but which you pretended not to remark.

But, be this as it may, you may believe me that she who, when in the world, sees nothing but you, will be a thousand times more delighted with you in retirement; and I myself should have been the first to propose going to Bellerive, had I not feared that by taking up my residence in the country in the middle of winter, I should attract attention to my feelings. Those who are accustomed to the world of Paris cannot conceive how it is possible to endure solitude, and exert their utmost fury in aspersing the motives of those who take the resolution of retiring. I give you this information before hand, in order, that, if the measure I am about to take, injure my reputation, you may be prepared for it, and not forget that it was adopted at your own request. In all the misfortunes which may befall me, I fear nothing but what may tend to wound your character.

The kind of life which you propose to me, has a thousand

times greater charms for me than for you. I hate the dissimulation which I should be compelled to practise in the world. I shall think, that I breathe a purer air when I see no person from whom I should conceal the only interest which engages my attention. I annex one condition only to my acquiescence—a condition which shall be invariable, whatever may befall us, that you will not conceal from me what Matilda may know of our mutual affection; and I have your promise that if it gives her any unhappiness, I may instantly set off, without your attempting to follow me. It is this assurance which permits me to enjoy, without too bitter a remorse, the pleasure of seeing you. Alas! to content myself with that promise, is not an instance of much severity towards myself. Adieu, Leonce. Yes, you shall come every evening to Bellerive. Ah! what a pleasing hope! recollect, however, that of all the situations in life, ours is the most uncertain. We are happy, but have every thing to fear: my friend, make the best of our destiny.

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## LETTER XXIX.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

January 2, 1791.

Unutterable happiness!

Which love alone bestows, and on a favoured few.

THOMSON.

OH! Delphine, how just was my conduct in desiring what your heart has so generously granted me! how much happier was I yesterday at Bellerive, than on any of the days when I saw you at Paris! I found you alone, and I was assured that this happiness would be uninterrupted. This reflection mingled a delicious serenity with my transports.

What charms did you shed over the detail of life, which pass unnoticed amidst the bustle of cities! what attentions did you not show me! the snow by the way had somewhat numbed me: your beautiful hands were a considerable time employed in blowing up the fire in order to restore my warmth. How much less amiable would it have been to call any of your servants to perform the office! you also took the highest pleasure in showing me what alterations you intend to make for the embellishment of your seat. Having found you hitherto so indifferent to this sort of taste and occupation, it seemed to me, and you agreed with me, that your happiness made you take an interest in every thing, and that you loved to decorate

every spot which we cease to wander over together. My heart did not neglect the most trivial observation, which could give me a proof of your tenderness. I even remarked those shrubs covered with flowers, which have been lately placed in your cabinet. That apartment was almost destitute of ornament when you appropriated it to the reception of the most splendid company in France; you have given it a holiday appearance for Leonce—for your friend.

Oh! how much did I delight in that vivacity, teeming with charms, with which you related to me the slightest trifles! An affecting joy animated your frame; your gaiety was not then the result of a sportive imagination, but an emotion of the heart. I smiled at the serious preparations made for supper by you who had never before, in the whole course of your life, wasted a thought upon such a subject; but you were anxious to assure yourself that I should have something of a restorative nature which could do me good, after the cold I had experienced. I yesterday discovered in you attractions entirely new to me, having never had occasion to witness them. The cares of domestic life have a singular grace in females. The most captivating of all women, the most distinguished for wit and beauty, does not disdain those kind and simple attentions, which it is sometimes pleasing to find at home. Oh! what a woman should I have possessed! and I might have united myself to you, I might—Wretch that I am! what have I said? No! I am not wretched! but in daily loving you with greater ardour, my sorrows also daily become more cruel. In short, tell me if it be possible to make you ever submit to be loved by me.

With what earnestness did you insist that we should remain faithful to the projected plan of occupying our time in reading together. Ah! you dreaded those soft reveries of love, which, of themselves, were sufficient to occupy my heart! I was desirous that we should, at least, select all of those books, in which I might find some description of the feelings which animated my bosom; but this request you obstinately refused. But no matter, my dear Delphine, your voice, though employed in reading to me, will inspire me with nothing but love. Speak in your own name, or, if you will, in the name of God himself; but let your hand be clasped in mine, and let me have the privilege of frequently pressing it to my heart. Tutelary angel of my life, adieu, till the evening.



## LETTER XXX.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

I WAS not satisfied with you yesterday, my dear Leonce. I never thought you were so indifferent to religious sentiments, and I venture to find fault with that indifference. Your morality has no other foundation than honour. You would have been much happier, had you adopted those true and simple principles, which, by subjecting our actions to the dictates of conscience, emancipate us from every other yoke. You cannot but know, that the education which I have received, instead of subjugating my mind, has perhaps rendered it too independent. It is even possible that superstition itself might be suited to the condition of females. Those tottering beings require a variety of supports; and love is a sort of credulity, which perhaps very easily blends with every other species. But the generous protector of my infant years had sufficient regard for my character to induce him to develop my understanding, and never desired me to adopt an opinion until I had investigated it with all the information I possessed. I may therefore speak to you on the religion I love, which I have freely and candidly examined with all the powers of my mind and my soul; and you cannot ascribe the sentiments I am about to disclose, to habits which authority has imposed, or to impressions received in the unreflecting period of infancy. I assure you, that ever since my mind was at all formed, the indifference and levity too often displayed by the world on religious ideas, has always excited in me strong feelings of disapprobation and repugnance. Whatever may be the degree of conviction, of hope, or of doubt, is of inferior importance; the soul prostrates itself before a chance as it would before a certainty, when it is filled with that one grand idea which still hovers over the destiny of mankind.

I was penetrated with these sentiments, Leonce, before I knew what it was to love: how powerfully must I not feel them now, when that passion expands my heart with ideas that are boundless, and wishes that never can end! I shall not attempt to retrace all the various kinds of proof which doubtless have engaged your attention; but let me ask you, whether you have since you loved me, felt in your heart something which revealed to you the hope of immortality.

At the death of M. d'Albemar, I was not quite without a religious belief; but I never before felt the necessity of recurring

to it. I was then so young that no painful sentiment had ever reached my heart, and those who have experienced no sorrow cannot have exercised much reflection. But on the death of my benefactor I was persuaded that I had not done enough for his happiness, and this idea was followed by the most tormenting remorse. The extreme difference of our ages, when he became my husband, frequently raised in my mind melancholy reflections on my situation. I feared I had sometimes given vent to those feelings, and now that he had ceased to live, I could not avoid reproaching myself for entertaining them. Nothing can be more horrible than the idea of repentance, when there are no possible means of expiation, when death has for ever deprived you of the hope of repairing the wrongs you have committed. So great was the influence of this melancholy reflection, that it would have affected my reason, had not the excellent sister of M. d'Albemar calmed my mind by representing to it, with new force, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul. Convinced that my generous friend was the witness of my sorrow, I at last believed that he had accepted my contrition; and the idea of his pardon poured consolation into my heart.

I executed his last orders with a religious punctuality: every time I fulfilled any of his wishes, I experienced an exquisite sensation which gives me the assurance that our souls still hold communication. What would have become of me, had I thought there was no longer any part of him in existence? What should I have done with my repentance? How could its pain have been mitigated, or where was I to seek for consolation for the slightest of my errors, if I had believed that he had received the seal of eternity? Shall it be said that those emotions of gratitude, those sentiments of regret which attach us to the dead, form the only falsehood of nature, the only grief without an object, the only desire without hope? Recollection, the most noble faculty of the soul would then prove our torment, by making us bestow our sorrows on nothing but the dispersed dust of those who were his friends.

It is true, my dear Leonce, I am not afraid of surviving you. I never shall weep over your tomb; for my life is inseparable from yours; but if that shocking system which has annihilation for its term, were to take possession of my soul, horror would be mingled with my love. How could I cherish the tender affection I feel for you, if I thought that all your excellent qualities were only the result of one of those happy combinations of chance which time produces and destroys? Could we, in the intimacy of our souls, search our most secret thoughts to intrust them to each other, when at last all our reflections must terminate in despair? An extraordinary sensation obscures my mind, when any process of reasoning snatches from it for a moment the hope of futurity, and encloses it within the nar-

row boundary of this life. I then feel that every thing is lost to me. I have no longer any confidence in myself; I tremble at the thought of being for ever separated from him I love. It seems to me that his countenance becomes pale, that his voice is lost in the gloom that surrounds me: I see him placed on the brink of an abyss. Every moment in which I speak to him, appears to me the last, since one must arrive to finish our intercourse for ever, and my soul experiences the agitation of fear, instead of the enjoyment of love.

But oh! how the sentiment of love is strengthened! how it elevates us when two souls mutually animate each other to place their trust in the Supreme Being. Do not, Leonce, do not resist the consolations which natural religion can afford. It is not possible for our minds to be convinced on this subject by positive argument, but our sensibility can teach us all that is necessary to be known. Take but a slight view of human destiny: you will there perceive only a few delightful moments of youth and love followed by a length of declining years which conduct from sorrow to sorrow, and from terror to terror, until the whole is closed by the awful hand of death. Hope is of all things most necessary to man, and yet his existence, after his twenty-fifth year, consists only of a series of days of which the present is always better than the next. He wishes to pause when he finds himself on the declivity of life; he clings to each twig in order that his steps may carry him less rapidly towards old age and the grave. He incessantly dreads the period for which the imagination is formed, the only one from which it never can be detached, futurity. Oh, Leonce, is this all the use of life? Is this soul of fire given to us for no purpose, but to be slowly extinguished in the agony of age?

By the faculty of loving I am enabled to feel within me the immortal source of life. What! shall my ashes be laid near thine without the hope of reviving! Shall we for ever be strangers to that nature which speaks so powerfully to the soul! Shall that magnificent sky whose aspect excites so many noble sentiments, and sublime ideas?—Shall those brilliant stars of night and of day, arise on our tomb, as they arose on our happiest hours, and nothing of us remain to admire them! No, Leonce, the idea of annihilation is as dreadful to me as that of guilt, and the same conscience teaches me to abhor both.

But how melancholy must be my hope if you do not partake of it. Shall I deliver up my soul to a future state which is not recognised as yours? What idea can my imagination afford me of happiness if it is not to be enjoyed with you? How shall I continue those solitary meditations which are not encouraged by your voice? I am capable of nothing by myself; I require to examine with you all my thoughts, in order to judge of them, admit them, and attach them to my love. Oh!

Leonce, Leonce, believe with me, that I may hope in peace, that I may follow thy brilliant course in that heaven, where my eyes seek thy place before they aspire to mine.

Indeed, Leonce, there exists another world, in which the factitious bonds of this are broken; where no enjoyment is promised but the love of those we love: Oh! be not impious to this hope! The happiness which sensibility gives, instead of diverting us like other pleasures, from paying that homage of gratitude which is due to the Creator, turns our minds incessantly towards him; the nearer we approach perfection, the more necessary becomes the idea of a Deity: and the more ardent and pure the affection of the heart, the less possible is it for us to resign them to the bounds of this life. I conjure you, Leonce, never allow yourself to speak with pleasantry of my desire, to inspire your soul with religious ideas. I should even doubt your love for me, if I could not succeed at least in making you respect those great questions, which have interested so many enlightened minds, and calmed so many suffering souls.

Levity, in the principles of conduct, soon leads to levity in sentiment. The art of speech may easily turn in derision every thing most sacred on earth; but the impassioned character repulses that superficial pride, which attacks all the powerful and deep-rooted affections. The enthusiasm which love inspires, is a new principle of life. Some enjoy it, but it is as unknown to others, as that future existence to which you will not turn your thoughts. We feel in ourselves, sentiments which vulgar souls cannot comprehend, let us then also hope for those blessings, of which we have at present but a confined prospect. Sublime ideas are as necessary to love as to virtue.

But, alas! is it fit that I should speak of virtue! I well know that pure morality would already reprove my conduct; and I am more severely judged by my own conscience, than I should be by the opinions received in the world; but I love the justice of Heaven better than the indulgence of man! Though I have not the resolution to renounce seeing you, I am convinced that I shall better preserve the natural qualities of my heart, by offering, each day, my repentance to the Supreme Being, than by seeking to doubt the power which condemns me.

The education which you have received, Leonce, the example and the recollection of the ancient Spanish manners, the military and romantic ideas which charmed your infancy, seem to you capable of supplying the place of the most delicate principles of religion and morality. All generous characters experience a pleasure in making sacrifices, and you have formed of the sentiment of honour, an almost superstitious respect for public opinion, an idol to which you would immolate yourself with joy. But if religious ideas occupied your mind, you would

be less sensible to the praise or the blame of the world; and, alas! perhaps calumny would not be so easily able either to irritate or convince you. Oh! my friend! devote to Heaven some of those qualities which distinguish you from other men. You will then find in your own approbation, a consolation which no one can disturb; and I shall also be more tranquil respecting my fate. Religious ideas, even when they condemn love, never dry up the source of that generous passion; but the perfidious falsehoods of the world wither for ever the affections of him who dreads, and yet obeys their influence.

You see, Leonce, that when speculating with you on the gravest subjects, I constantly revert to that interest by which I am governed, to your sentiment of attachment for me. Neither this letter, nor any other action of my life, can henceforth be attributed to virtue; for love alone is the origin of all the good as well as all the evil I perform.

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## LETTER XXXI.

### LEONCE'S ANSWER TO DELPHINE.

God is thy law, thou mine.—MILTON.

MY Delphine, I at first wished to reply to your letter by a personal interview: I should then have thrown myself at your feet, and would have said: "Art not thou the absolute mistress of my soul?" Present it as a homage, if thou wilt, to the Supreme Being; dispose of that which is thy own. Adore, in my name, that Providence which is doubtless best manifested to the most perfect of created things; for thee alone do I experience enthusiasm. That pleasing melancholy, those elevated ideas, which are the sources of religion to thee, serve only to impel me towards thy image: thou hast completely filled in me that vacancy of the heart which, in thee, renders the idea of a God so necessary. I have, however, resolved to write before I speak to you, that my answer may be the more calm.

I never would wish to combat your angelic hopes: may they be founded in truth! but allow me for once to vindicate myself from those faults with which you accuse me, and the fatal influence of which you so erroneously read, alas! I have not forgotten the day which has infused its poison into the whole of my life. I do not think, however, that my character ought to be blamed on that account. It was jealousy which agitated me; and had it not been for that passion, every thing would have been speedily explained. It is true I regard my reputation as of the greatest importance, and I could not en-

degraded to live, were my name disgraced by the slightest violation of the laws of honour; but what has she I love, to fear from this sentiment? Does it not give me the right, the happiness of defending her against all those who dare to calumniate her? It has often been said, that women ought to be more careful how they offend against public opinion than men: I do not think so.—To protect those we love, to cover with our personal glory, the companion of our life, is a duty we owe ourselves: if we lose that personal reputation, nothing can restore it; but a woman, though attacked by opinion, may recover her character, by taking the name of an honourable man, associating her existence with his, and receiving under his tutelary protection, the homage he is capable of procuring her.

All women are enthusiastic admirers of valour; but that quality which it is not possible to suppose any man can want, cannot sufficiently ensure him the respect of the world, unless he join to it an imposing character.—Intrepid courage cannot alone obtain that degree of honour and esteem, which a dignified mind desires. The daily circumstances, on which, taken together, personal consideration is founded, involve not questions of life or death: but he who displays in his habitual conduct, a proper dignity, a scrupulous respect for all the delicate sentiments, even all the prejudices of honour, is never censured by the public: he preserves entire, that reputation which forms the real existence of a man of honour, and which enables him to punish by his contempt, or reward by his approbation.

If I cannot conceal from the world your sentiment for me, I hope at least that my reputation will serve for your apology. You say, you would not have me to depend on the opinion of men: you know I never desire their society: all I wish for is to pass my life at your feet. It is I who still more than you, cherish solitude. But I will feel myself assailed by the censures of the same men, whose opinions in any other circumstances would be indifferent to me.

But why should this mode of thinking displease you? The same warmth of blood which inspires the impassioned affections, makes us powerfully feel the slightest appearance of injury or insult. The bold and warlike virtues which distinguished the heroes of antiquity are allied with the feelings of love. Enthusiasm is not inspired by religious ideas alone. If our ancestors have transmitted to us a respectable name; the desire of imitating them is honourable. The enjoyments arising from the pursuit of glory affect the soul with not less force than the pious hopes of the faithful; and if I do not indulge in the unknown happiness of meeting you again in heaven, I feel strongly that I ought to make you respected on earth, and that I shall experience the sincerest pleasure in

exposing my life a thousand times in your behalf, to wipe from your character even the shadow of blame; or to free you from the slightest uneasiness.

Delphine—do not say that my character distresses and afflicts you. I know not if my heart is deceived, but I have often been inclined to think that you loved me for those very faults which you dread. (Do they not present you a support on which you delight to repose?) Your adorable qualities, your beauty, and your wit, excite envy, and envy creates to you many enemies. You pay little attention to those arbitrary institutions of society by which ordinary minds are directed. Your grace is easy and natural; you speak from the first impulse of your feelings, and this impulse is the real genius that inspires you. But what constitutes your greatest charm with those who know you, is the chief source of your danger in the conduct of life.

Tell me then, Delphine, is it not of such a protector as I am that you stand in need? My character sufficiently steady, and sufficiently calm to outward appearance, will serve to direct the exercise of your goodness, ever exposed to difficulties. You expose yourself to dangers; I will protect you. From the same cause you excite at once jealousy and admiration around you; your superiority of understanding might inspire awe, but the gentleness and kindness of your nature, give confidence to those who wish to destroy you. You should have had near you a man at once irritable and bold, who would not suffer the vicious part of mankind at once to enjoy the double pleasure of being delighted with all that is amiable in your character, and of endeavouring to rob you of the qualities which render you lovely. Oh! if I had been your husband: if I had enjoyed the right of disclosing the whole extent of my love in the presence of all, never would malignity have once dared to approach your steps; and now, notwithstanding all that has happened, is it incumbent on me to practise dissimulation? No:—I have received from your love the guardianship of your honour and your happiness, and to me it belongs to preserve it.

You are convinced that religious ideas are the best support of morality; that they have a much more beneficial influence than the laws of honour or regard for public opinion. Believe me, honour has its conscience as well as religion, and the idea of being sunk in one's own estimation is a grief more insupportable than all the feeling of remorse, arising from the hopes or the fears of a future world. The sentiment which rules over me is the most imperious of all. I have read in an English Poet these words, which I shall never forget: *Tears can wash out crimes, but never a sense of infamy,*

Nor tears that wash our guilt, can wash our shame.

PRIOR.

Repentance gives the hope of pardon to the religious, but for honour there is no repentance. What a thought! how powerfully even in the earliest years of life does it induce a habit of never yielding to the emotion of weakness, and of never repelling the most secret feelings when they are suggested by delicacy. But even if man does not embrace all the branches of morality, cannot sensibility fill up what is left imperfect?

In what duty then can he be deficient who respects and adores you? Delphine, pardon me for being incapable of conceiving, or of desiring more. I am not altogether ignorant that my character has in it a degree of gloom, of susceptibility, and of violence, which might poison those qualities which I myself believe to be good. Your empire over me will modify my faults, but will not wholly change their nature.

I have thought it necessary to say something in my justification to calm your uneasiness; I have thought it proper to justify myself, to present myself, if I am able, with more advantage before you. The opinion of all the rest of the world, whatever importance I attach to it, could not have inspired me with such an ardour in my defence.

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## LETTER XXXII.

MADAME D'ARTENAS TO DELPHINE.

Paris, 6th February, 1791.

WHY do you prolong your stay in the country, my dear Delphine! Every one is astonished at seeing you quit Paris in the middle of winter, at the moment when your appearance in the gay world was so brilliant. Some persons begin to whisper that your attachment to Leoncé is the only cause of your sacrifice. I have often told you, that you were in the wrong to withdraw yourself; your grand hope of success consists in your presence. Your manners are all so simple, and so amiable, that all the admiration you excite, is beheld without jealousy. But when you withdraw yourself, the attachment of your friends is cooled, for this is in the very nature of friendship, and the spirits of your enemies are elated, from the hope of success.

In fifteen days, you completely removed the prejudices raised against you in consequence of your supposed connexion with M. Serbellane, and all at once you give up the field to envious women and to men, by whom their propensity to scandal is encouraged.



But you will tell me, that in the country you can more easily indulge in the feelings which are dearest to your heart; that your thoughts and your actions are more free from embarrassment. Accident, and your confidence, having made me acquainted with your attachment to Leonce, I wish to give you a useful moral lesson, when I tell you that you act very improperly, in thus passing the half of your life alone with him. But confining myself to the principles which I know you to possess, and limiting my advice merely to considerations of external interest, I tell you, that to support the enthusiasm with which Leonce has inspired you, it is necessary that you should continue to dazzle by your success. He was impassioned, almost to folly, the night that you spent at my house; and though no doubt he boasts of the charms of conversation with you when there is no one present to hear your vows of affection; believe me, when he hears all Paris speaking loudly of your charms, when he hears every one exclaiming that no other woman can be compared to you, he will be still more flattered by your attachment, and will experience a greater degree of satisfaction. Do not exclaim that there is nothing at all romantic in this manner of seeing him. You ought to consider, that the happiness of sentiment, as every other kind of happiness, must be preserved with wisdom; and to render even the happiness of being adored, which is always accompanied with danger, as long-lived as possible, it is necessary to employ the assistance of reason. Whatever are the means of inspiring affection, I do not now speak of them; you understand them too well to stand in need of my counsels. What is now to be provided for, however, is your existence in the world, and the whisper which precedes the open attack has already been heard for several days. The day before yesterday, Mad. de Crorssy, who hitherto had prevailed on her self-love to express admiration for you, said with an affected air, "that for a conversation of sentiment, I pitch my feelings a whole octave." Oh! what uneasiness it gives me,—Madame d'Albemar is established at Bellerive! No one knows better than I do, that it is her taste for study which has fixed her in that retreat. But other people will put a different construction on her conduct, and we ought not unnecessarily to expose ourselves to censure. This malignant proof of the interest which Mad. de Crorssy takes in you, was the first signal of the scandal which was preparing against you. M. de Vernueil, who is so little able to conceal the chagrin which the admiration you at all times receive, excites in his bosom, replied Mad. d'Albemar, is doubtless an excellent person; but I am much afraid her head is a little turned. These ladies of genius, I often repeated to my poor sister in her life-time, always experience some misfortune or other. I have had several instances of this in my own family; and therefore I am much more pleased with plain

common sense. Nobody says that I possess genius, because I do not wish that any such opinion should be formed of me; besides, what a difference is there betwixt the male and female sex. There are occasions when it may, perhaps, be useful to a man to discover among those who are his dupes, something like superiority of understanding and liveliness of wit. But a woman, a woman! Oh! it serves no other purpose, in her, but to make her guilty of follies and absurdities. When I say this, it is not that I am not fond of Mad. d'Albemar, but I much dread some sad accident will destroy her repose. Her conversation, I readily allow, is to me extremely amusing, but that it would not be prudent to form an intimate connexion with her, for I am persuaded that one day or other she will experience severe sufferings, and I am not at all desirous of being in that situation which would make it necessary for me to share them. Mad. de Tesin, who you know has double pretensions to wisdom and wit, interrupted M. de Vernueil, and said to him, "it is not, sir, it is not genius which you ought to blame. We know persons who in this respect may without difficulty, be compared to Madame d'Albemar, but who possess much more knowledge of the world, and are much better acquainted with the mode of properly conducting themselves. These persons are not contented with slining in a drawing-room, but employ their talents in endeavouring to avoid occasions of traducing their characters, or injuring their interests. Distinguish, I beseech you, sir, betwixt the errors which the levity of Mad. d'Albemar produces, and the general inconvenience of a superiority of understanding and wit. Wit is what eminently distinguishes women, celebrated for their superiority of mind." I was preparing to enter into a dispute on this subject with Mad. de Tesin and M. de Vernueil, when Mad. du Marset and M. de Fierville sought to lead the conversation to you, and they did this with a degree of address truly perfidious. I wished to avoid saying any thing in your support, because that would have been to grant that you had been attacked, but it was necessary to put an end to their conversation. I had at last the happiness of persuading those who listened to me. What fully proved this, was that M. de Fierville, who at all times gives to Mad. du Marset the signal of retreat, because he has less bitterness and less perseverance in his sarcasms, hastened to reply, by loading you with praises. I could have easily shown him the contradiction betwixt the beginning of the conversation, and its conclusion; but I did not wish to interest his self-love, by making him a man of consequence. I have frequently had occasion to remark in society, that a great deal of injury is frequently done to friends, even in their justification, when the self-love of those who attack them is roused. Much more caution and skill is requisite, when we are to praise a friend, than to blame a person who is

indifferent to us. If a friend is to be defended, with honour, we must avoid all allusion to ourselves, for if pains are taken to extol our own character, while we pretend to speak only of his, we injure him materially instead of rendering him a service.

I believed, the day before yesterday, that this matter was settled; but yesterday, Madame du Marset (I am confident it was her,) instigated a woman in all respects insignificant, but of whom she has the entire disposal, to speak against you, because Madame du Marset would not have been listened to. This woman, accordingly, after a deep sigh, suddenly exclaimed, "Poor Madame de Mondeville!" Every one present began to ask for the reasons of this pity, and she, without hesitation, replied that she believed the unhappy passion which Leonce had for you, was to her a cause of very great misery. At this moment, M. de Fierville, who of all the men in the world is the least disposed to indulge in melancholy ideas, assumed an air of concern truly ludicrous. Madame du Marset raised her eyes to heaven, hoping by this means to give herself an air of benevolent compassion; and though she is in her maxims and domestic duties, the most frivolous and least scrupulous of women, she displayed the utmost eagerness to inculcate the severest doctrines, and expatiated strongly on the duties you owed to Madame de Mondeville.

When a Parisian company discovers a disposition to apply strict morality against any particular individual, it is then more than in any other instance that their opinions and decisions are formidable. The greater part of those who compose this society, are in general extremely indulgent to their own conduct, and frequently too to that of others, when they have no interest in blaming it; but if, unhappily, it is agreed on to take up the serene side of the question, nothing then is to be heard but grave lectures on duty and principle, and the rigour of their language is much greater than the severity of women really austere, who regulate their own conduct by the rules they employ, when judging of the conduct of others. Those descriptions of virtue, which excite our jealousy and ill-will, are clothed in all the charms of rhetoric, and on certain occasions libertines and coquets expatiate on them with the utmost passion. I bore all this for some time, but at length supported by several of your friends, I said that I was perfectly sure of the happiness of Madame de Mondeville, and their detestable designs were for the present frustrated. But in this way a repetition of victories amounts to a defeat. I conjure you then, my dear Delphine, return to Paris, and show yourself for the purpose of annihilating these obscure and petty enmities, by the admiration you must ever excite in all who behold you. In the midst of the most brilliant societies there are a number of individuals not deficient in impartiality, who suffer themselves to be guided

by first impressions, without judging of them by their own pretensions or those of others. This large number, for the number of the good is always large, will espouse your cause. But these very same persons being weak and destitute of any particular feeling of interest, suffer your enemies to speak, when you cannot awe them into silence by your irresistible charms. At first they do not listen to them at all; it is some time before they will believe them, but at length they persuade themselves that all the world speaks ill of you, and adopt that opinion which they believe to be general, and which they have rendered such, without being sincerely convinced of its truth.

This sketch of the progress of calumny is equally applicable to the greatest public interests, as to the details of private society. But since we are aware of its artifices, let us endeavour to guard against them. I conclude with again entreating you, my dear Delphine, to confide in my aged counsels. They are dictated by friendship, which possesses all the warmth and fervour of youth.

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## LETTER XXXIII.

### ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO MADAME D'ARTENAS.

Bellerive, Feb. 8th.

ALL that you tell me, madam, is replete with judgment and good sense; and what still more affects me, your perfect friendship for me is visible in every line of your letter. I would follow your advice, had I not resolved to pass my life in solitude. I am aware how much I expose myself to that calumny, which you with so much kindness attempt to combat. But when I sacrifice to the happiness of Leonce, that duty which would, perhaps, prohibit me from continuing to see him; the slightest wish on his part is sufficient to reconcile me to the sacrifice of my existence in the world. He has requested that I should remain at Bellerive; my return to Paris would make him unhappy. Say, then, whether I can think of returning. Ah! I ought to overlook his sufferings, in order to retire into Languedoc, to retire from the danger of his presence, from the impropriety of participating an attachment which I ought to repel; but to give him a moment's regret for the sake of attending to what are called my own interests, is what I will never do.

I am convinced Matilda is happy. I make daily inquiries as to her mode of life; and I know even the slightest gradations of her impressions. If she discovered my attachment for Le-

once, and if that attachment, though of the purest kind, gave her any offence, I would set off that instant. I would, perhaps, even depart without that motive, were the sentiments which I entertain for him not altogether sufficient for the consolation of Leonce, and were I able in a moment of resolution, to renounce a situation which my own mind condemns. Never in that case, would I return to Paris; never should those who busy themselves in judging of my conduct see me again in the whole course of their lives; nor could any thing, for the future, give me either pleasure or pain.

But whatever may befall me, never shall I forget that protecting friendship of which you have given me incessant proofs. At the moment when I received your letter, I had some thought of going to pass a few hours at Paris, for the purpose of expressing my gratitude towards you; but Madame de Monderville, having, in consequence of the lent season, shut herself up in the convent where she received her education, I have fixed upon to-morrow in order to propose to Leonce to accompany me on a visit to a family from Languedoc, who have come to live in my neighbourhood, and whom I have long been desirous of seeing. In a few days I shall indemnify myself for the loss which I sustain in not seeing you. It is you only who could make me quit my retreat. Forgive me for not regretting any one at Paris except you.

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## LETTER XXXIV.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, February 10.

You ask me, my friend, whether I am happy; and laying aside the austerity of a master, you tell me, that you are interested above all things in discovering the inmost sentiments of my heart. Why did you not make this inquiry a few days ago? I then enjoyed greater self-complacency. I fear that the evening of yesterday, has thrown me into a state of disquietude, from which I cannot henceforward rescue myself. You will be able to form a more accurate estimate of my feelings, when I relate to you what has happened; to retrace it, is at once, a pleasing and a painful task.

For more than a month, I enjoyed the happiness of daily seeing that angelic being, whom you had selected as the companion of my life. Impetuous desires, and invincible regrets, sometimes took possession of my soul, during the most delicious moments of our conversations; but, at length happiness predominated over misery. At present I know not whether

the conflict is not too violent, and whether I can ever again experience those soft impressions, which enabled me to taste the imperfect enjoyments of my destiny.

Yesterday, Madame de Mondeville being absent, I had an opportunity of passing the whole day at Bellerive. Madame d'Albemar proposed to me a walk after dinner, telling me that a family from Languedoc, whose name she thought she recollected, had come to reside close by her, and that she wished we should go together to inquire respecting them. We set out, and Madame d'Albemar ordered her carriage to meet us half a league from Bellerive.

When we approached the place where we were informed they resided, we observed at a little distance, a cottage, small, but neat, and heard the sound of voices and musical instruments, forming a concert, which we thought uncommonly harmonious. On reaching the cottage, a child who stood in the door amusing itself with making snow-balls, offered to show us in; but the mother on hearing its voice, came out to meet us. Madame d'Albemar, though she had not seen her for ten years before, instantly recognised Mademoiselle de Seuanges, whom she had sometimes met at the parties of M. d'Albemar. Mademoiselle de Seuanges, now Madame de Belmont, gave Delphine the most amiable and kind reception. We followed her into the little apartment, which served as her parlour, where we found a man, about thirty years of age, seated before a piano-forte, on which he accompanied the voice of a daughter about eight years old. He rose from his seat, at our entrance, and his wife immediately going up to him, gave him the assistance of her arm, as he advanced to meet us. We then perceived that he was blind; but notwithstanding the loss of his sight, his figure still retained somewhat of an engaging and dignified air; while all his features displayed an expression of serenity, which even repressed a rising emotion of pity.

Delphine, whose heart is so accessible to the emotions of benevolence, was visibly agitated, notwithstanding all her efforts to conceal her feelings. She put a question to Madame de Belmont, respecting the motives of her departure from Languedoc ———. The loss of a law-suit, answered she, in which M. de Belmont and myself were engaged, plunged us into irretrievable ruin. I had already been deprived of one half my fortune, by an aunt having disinherited me on account of my marriage. All that remains for my husband, my children, and myself, is a revenue of eighty louis d'or. We preferred living in a country where we were entirely unknown, to the necessity of preserving (without a fortune to sustain the expense,) our former connexions in society. Besides, this climate agrees better with my husband's health than the warm climate of the South; and during the fortnight we have

passed here, we find ourselves perfectly pleased with the situation.

M. de Belmont then said a few words to the effect of congratulating himself on being acquainted with a person of Madame d'Albemar's character. He expressed himself with considerable grace and propriety; and his wife, remarking with a feeling of pleasure, that she had seen Madame d'Albemar when but a child at her father's house, talked to her of their common relations with the most perfect simplicity and serenity. I looked at her attentively, but in no part of her manner could I discern the slightest trace of any cause of unhappiness. She did not even seem to surmise that there was, in her situation, any thing which could excite an extraordinary interest, and it was a considerable time before she perceived that with which it had inspired our bosoms.

Her husband, wishing to show us his garden, gave his arm to his wife, in order to conduct him thither. She seemed to have been so much accustomed to lead him, that when, upon going to give some directions, she for a moment intrusted his arm to Delphine; she walked away with a kind of uneasiness, turned back repeatedly, and appeared not disturbed, for she has too much simplicity to be apprehensive without a motive, but as if completely out of the habit of making a single step, when except she performs the part of a guide to her husband.

M. de Belmont every moment increased the interest which we had taken in his fate, by the charms of his wit, and the solidity of his understanding. We repeatedly engaged him in a conversation respecting his avocations and interests. He always replied to us with pleasure, seeming completely to forget that he was blind and ruined, giving us the impression of a man happy and tranquil, who, in the whole course of his life has not had the slightest occasion to practise any effort of courage, nor even of resignation; only in pronouncing the name of his wife, and in calling her my dear friend; he spoke in an accent which I cannot define, but which vibrated to all the remembrances of his life, and made us comprehend them without their being expressed.

We returned to the house. The piano-forte was still uncovered, and Delphine expressed a wish to M. and Mad. Belmont, to hear, while present, the music which charmed us at a distance. They consented to gratify her, informing us at the same time, that as they almost always sung trios with their daughter, the piece of music we were to hear would be extremely simple. The father then executed a prelude on the harpsicord, in a style which evinced superior talent and profound sensibility. I cannot conceive a more affecting object than a blind man inspired with an enthusiasm for music. One would almost imagine that the diversity of sounds, and the impressions which they produce, give him back that enjoyment

of all nature, of which he has been deprived. The timidity inseparable from so unfortunate an infirmity prevents him from mentioning to others the regret which he feels, while they, on the other hand, almost always avoid talking of it to him. But when a blind man entertains you with a musical air of a melancholy cast, it should seem as if he communicated the secret of his woes; and he rejoices in having at length attained that delicious language which permits him to melt the heart, without the fear of fatiguing it.

The beautiful eyes of my Delphine were filled with tears, and, from the heaving of her bosom, I could perceive the deep emotions of her soul! But when M. de Belmont and his wife began to sing in concert, and their daughter, eight years old, mingled her clear infantile voice with those of her parents, it was impossible to resist the impression. They gave us one of the airs sung by the reaping girls of Languedoc, the rustic burden of which is to this effect:

O mother grant my fond desire,  
For life, my lover be my spouse;  
I'll love him with such tender vows,  
As you through life, have loved my sire.

The little daughter raised her eyes towards her mother as she sung these words. Her countenance beamed with innocence; but being brought up with parents who lived only in the exercise of the tender affections, she had already in her look and voice that expression of melancholy which is so interesting at her age, that melancholy which is a presage of the destiny that menaces the child, while she remains unconscious of the omen. The mother took up the same burden, varying the words in this manner:

Thy mother grants thy fond desire,  
For life, thy lover be thy spouse;  
And love him with such tender vows,  
As she through life, has loved thy sire.

As she sung the last line, there was something so impassioned in the look of Mad. de Belmont, and this emotion was soon succeeded by so much modesty, that I felt myself penetrated with respect and enthusiastic admiration for those generous ties of family, which can inspire at once such heartfelt elation and happiness. The father then sung in his turn:

Be like thy mother, I desire,  
And take thy lover for thy spouse;  
And love him with such tender vows,  
As she through life, has loved thy sire.



In pronouncing these words, M. de Belmont entirely lost his voice; and it was with some difficulty that he recovered it, while all the three repeated the burden in chorus, to a wild air which still seemed to be returned on the ear by the echoes of the Pyrennees.

Their voices were perfectly adapted to each other. That of the husband, deep and sonorous, blended a dignified boldness with the soft tones of the females. Their situation, the expression of their features, every thing harmonized with the purest sensibility. There was nothing to interrupt it; there was nothing wanting even to the imagination itself. Delphine has since told me that the commiseration which she felt on beholding so perfect a union of all that could touch the soul, was so excessive, that she no longer had strength to support it. She was quite overpowered with her tears, when Mad. de Belmont threw herself almost into her arms and said, "Amiable Delphine, I know you well; but do you believe us unhappy? Ah! how much you are deceived!" Then, as if the music had suddenly confirmed our intimacy she placed herself near Mad. d'Albemar, and spoke as follows:

"When I knew you ten years ago, M. de Belmont had already loved for some years; but as it was feared he would lose his sight, my relations opposed our marriage. He became entirely blind, and then I threw off all the reserve which prudence had hitherto induced me to keep up with my own family. Every moment's delay, when I was become so necessary to him, appeared to me insupportable; and as I had neither father nor mother, I conceived I had the right of deciding for myself. I received him unknown to my relations, and for some time I suffered infinite pain in consequence of their threats to annul our marriage! It was, however, ascertained, that this was beyond their power, and they then endeavoured to ruin our fortune, in which they but too well succeeded: but as I had for some time feared they would be able to separate me from M. de Belmont, I was scarce sensible to the loss of our fortune: my imagination was entirely occupied with the misfortune I had avoided.

"My husband," continued she, "instructed his son, I educated my daughter, and our poverty connecting us more intimately with our children, yielded us new enjoyments, when perfectly happy in our affections: those misfortunes which tend by the force of circumstances, to draw closer the bonds that unite us, ought to be regarded as the favours of Providence. I would not venture to speak this before M. de Belmont, if I did not know that his blindness does not render him unhappy; but that accident has found him in the bosom of his family, and renders my arm, my voice, and my presence at every moment necessary to him. He saw me in the spring of my youth, and he will always preserve the same recollection of my person. I

in my turn can love him, with all the delights, all the enthusiasm of passion, without any fear of the expression of my sentiments being less valued, in consequence of the decay of my charms. I say this before M. de Belmont, madame, because it is proper he should know what I think of him, since I would not quit him for a moment, not even to have the pleasure of praising him. The greatest happiness a woman can enjoy, is to have for her husband a man whom she respects as much as she loves; who is superior to her in mind and character, and who decides every thing for her, not because he controls her will, but because he enlightens her reason and supports her weakness. Even in circumstances in which her opinion may differ from his, she yields with pleasure and confidence to him who is responsible for their common destiny, and who can alone repair an error if it should be committed. The intention of nature is not accomplished in marriage, unless the merit of the husband gives him a real advantage over the wife, an advantage which she acknowledges, and of which she is proud. Unhappy are those women who are obliged to be the sole judges of their own conduct, and to conceal the defects and the littlenesses of their husbands, or to emancipate themselves from them, and sustain alone the burden of existence! the greatest of all pleasures is, that admiration of the heart, which occupies every moment, gives an object to every action, creates a constant incentive to improvement, and above all, renders dearest to us the true glory and approbation of him, who honours us by his love. Amiable Delphine, do not estimate the happiness or misery of families, by the advantages they have received from fortune or from nature. Learn the degree of affection with which conjugal love has blessed them, and then only will you be able to ascertain what is their portion of felicity on earth!

“She has not told you all, my kind friend,” said M. de Belmont, “she has spoken of the pleasure he has received from the exercise of the most unexampled generosity. She sacrificed every thing for me, who had no prospect to offer her but a series of unfortunate days, during which still greater sacrifices were necessary. Rich, young, and beautiful, she devoted her life to a blind man who was not only destitute of fortune himself, but made her be deprived of that which she possessed. Among the treasures of heaven, there existed an inestimable blessing, and it has been bestowed on me to compensate for an evil which many unhappy beings have been condemned to suffer without any consolation. An ardent and pure affection has the power of converting the real misfortunes of life into enjoyments. It affords me pleasure to reflect that I cannot move a step, unassisted by the arm of my wife, and that I should even be incapable of taking nourishment, if she did not put into my hands the aliments she intends for me. No

new idea would enliven my imagination, if she did not read to me the works with which I wish to be made acquainted. Every thought that reaches my mind, receives a charm from her voice: all my moral feelings arrive to me through her, and take their character from her. Providence gave me life, but left to her the care of completing that present, which would be useless and painful to me, without her assistance.

I believe, continued M. de Belmont, I love with more ardour than any other man, for all my being is concentrated in the sentiment; but how does it happen that all men do not seek for happiness in their own families? I am persuaded, indeed, that no woman but my wife, could have rendered the marriage state so delightful. I regret, however, that I never can see my children, but I am convinced they resemble their mother. Of all the images which my eyes formerly collected, only one has remained perfectly distinct in my memory, and that is the figure of my wife. Her features are so strongly impressed upon my mind, that I can scarce think myself blind when beside her. Have you observed how sweet her voice is? When she speaks, her accents are always soft and graceful, because she wishes to prolong the pleasures I still possess. I feel all, I forget nothing; the touch of her hand, the tones of her voice never can be effaced from my recollection. Ah! how happy is that state of existence in which we can thus avow all the affections, and their charms! To enjoy it without experiencing any of those inconsistencies of the heart, which are sometimes the offspring of the splendors of fortune, or the brilliant gifts of nature.

Though my situation cannot be compared with that of any other person, I would declare to the grandees of the earth, to the beautiful and the young, that there is no happiness in life except in marriage, in the affection of children, which never is perfect except when their mother is beloved and cherished. Men, possessing more freedom of action than women, think they can easily find substitutes for domestic enjoyments; but I know not what secret force Providence has given to moral sentiment; the circumstances of life appear independent of its power, and yet it alone ultimately regulates them. No connexions out of marriage are lasting: terrible events, or natural disgusts, break those bonds which were thought the most solid. Opinion pursues you, opinion in some manner or other always insinuates a poison into your happiness: and were it possible to escape from its empire, can the pleasure of meeting occasionally for a few hours in public circles, be compared with the happiness arising from the perfect intimacy of marriage? What would have become of me, had I not been blest by that state? I could only transfer my cares to one who was too proud to share them. How should I have been able to struggle against the order of society? I whom nature has dis-

armed. How necessary was the protection of constant and solid virtues to me, since I could acquire nothing myself, and could only hope for the happiness which sought me. But it is not merely consolation I possess; I enjoy felicity itself; and I repeat it with confidence, that he who is not made happy by marriage is a solitary being, he is alone in the world, for he is condemned sooner or later to live without being loved.

M. de Belmont pronounced these last words with so much warmth, that they produced a violent sensation in my soul. I confess to you that when any circumstance revives in my mind, my sorrow for not having espoused Madame d'Albemar, I am thrown into a state resembling that which the ancients supposed to result from the vengeance of the furies. That sorrow sometimes slumbers in my bosom; but, when it is awakened, I feel that it never had left me, and all the events which are passed are retraced with the most painful regret.

Madame d'Albemar soon perceived in me the impetuous and tormenting force of this recollection. I had, indeed, long resisted it; but so many irritations of the same wound, had at last rendered it too painful to be endured. Delphine rose, and said she must go away. As the sky threatened snow, M. and Madame de Belmont wished to prevail on her to stop. She looked at me; and, I believe, observed that my countenance was entirely discomposed; for she repeated decisively that her carriage waited for her a few yards from the house, and that she must go. She promised to return. M. and Madame de Belmont and their two children accompanied her to the door, with that affection she always excites in all those who are capable of estimating her character.

I gave her my arm without saying a word, and in that way we walked along for some time. Her carriage was not to be found at the place where it was to have waited for us; our orders had been misunderstood; and the snow began to fall in great abundance. "I am cold," said she. These words awakened me from the reverie in which I was absorbed. Looking at her, I saw she was very pale, and feared lest her health should be injured by the distance we still had to walk. I begged of her to permit me to carry her, in order that her feet at least might be kept out of the snow. At first she refused; but her situation becoming more alarming, I insisted, perhaps with some roughness; for I was agitated by the most painful sentiments: Delphine then yielded to my desire. I thought I perceived that she hoped my tormenting sensations would be mitigated by the pleasure of rendering her this trifling service.

I carried her, my friend, for half a league, experiencing emotions so powerful and various, that my whole soul was convulsed; agitated sometimes by the fervour of love, I pressed her to my bosom, and declared that she must be my spouse,

my mistress, the being whose life must be united with mine. She repulsed me, sighed, and threatened to refuse my assistance. At one time, the severity of the cold was so great, that her head reclined upon me. I carried her along as if she had been lifeless. I looked up to heaven with inexpressible emotion: I know not what was my wish; but, had she died in my arms, I should have followed her, and should no longer have felt the pain which pursues me. At last we arrived, and my cares completely revived her. I was impatient to leave her. I no longer found pleasure in Bellerive, in those scenes which formed my delight. Wretch that I am, why did I behold the spectacle of so happy a union!

Blind, ruined, and shut up in a corner, they are rendered happy by love in marriage! yet I, who am capable of enjoying that blessing in the midst of every kind of human prosperity, have delivered up my heart to the most cruel torments, which never will leave me but with my life.

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## LETTER XXXV.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

YESTERDAY you did not continue with me more than a quarter of an hour. You scarcely spoke to me, and at your departure I saw that you took the road to the forest instead of returning to Paris. I have since learned that you did not return to your house till morning. You passed that frosty night alone, on horseback not far from my house; but it was you who wished to abridge our conversation in the evening. Distressed and uneasy I continued at my window during the whole night. Leonce, thus occupied with each other, we fear to disclose our feelings. What is it you conceal from me? Just heaven! are we no longer able to understand each other.

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## LETTER XXXVI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

I HAVE passed a night far more sweet than the days that are allotted to me. The sadness of winter pleased me, and I had no reproaches to utter against nature.

But you, you who see my retreat, now do you deign to

regard my sufferings with compassion? The shivering cold, which the tedious hour of the night made me experience, was pleasing to me; is it not thus that death is announced to us; and do you not perceive that ere long it will be necessary to fly to it as my only relief from the ills of life? You ask me if I conceal any thing from you; does love admit of any secrets? If you possess the same feelings which hold dominion over my heart, can you fail fully to comprehend all my wishes and my thoughts? But since you ask me what is the secret I conceal from you, I will tell you what it is—it is that I am unhappy. Ask nothing more from me.

## LETTER XXXVII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

You are unhappy, Leonce; ah! it was the inspiration of heaven which bade me depart; which bade me refuse to listen to your oaths. You vowed to me that my stay would satisfy every wish of your heart. By this hope you seduced me, and now you no longer fear to deprive me of it. Formerly the same sentiments gave us delight; but now, alas! what has become of that delightful union of feelings and thoughts. Do you know what I experienced? Our situation afforded me the utmost delight. Infatuated, that I was! I was happy, and I wished to tell you so. Oh! how have you repressed this imprudent confidence.

But whence, Leonce, does this unhappy difference between us proceed? Do you imagine that you possess the right of telling me, that you are more susceptible of affection, than I am? With what disdain should I receive that reproach? I know sacrifices which you have not courage to make for me! there is not a single sacrifice in life, which would even deserve your gratitude, so little would it cost me. Have I spoken to you of the injury which my stay at Bellerive has done me? Far from being alarmed at the sufferings to which my love may expose me, I delight to think of imaginary dangers and misfortunes, which with transport I would brave for you.

Will you dare to pretend that the gift, or rather the degradation of myself, is the sacrifice which I owe to him whom I love? My friend, it would be our love which I would offer up, if I renounced that generous enthusiasm which animates our mutual affection. By yielding to your desire, we should henceforth be nothing but lovers without passion, because we should be without virtue; and thus we would dispel the enchantment, which governs the feelings of our hearts.

If I should fail in the last duties, which I still continue to respect, what would my conduct appear in my own eyes? I should see myself condemned to pass my life in solitude with the man whom I love, with the husband of another. There I would continue without a struggle, and without remorse. Of my own accord I should have rushed into guilt, and been covered with shame! O Leonce! already I am but too culpable, and do you wish to degrade the image of Delphine? Do you wish to degrade me in your esteem? Let her go, and the remembrance of her will never be effaced—let her die, and you will shed tears over her tomb. But if you render her criminal, in vain will you seek to find her, what she now is. In society, in your memory, nay even in your heart, I shall cease to have an existence, and her humbled head will bend to the earth, no longer daring to look up to heaven, or to Leonce.

Yesterday you were not in the wrong when you reproached me with being insensible to the force of love: your accent was plaintive and melancholy; you accused me of being ignorant of what it was to possess ardent affection. Ah! do you believe that my love is without its delights and its transports. Passion, which is founded on innocence has pleasures which your heart profanes. Before you had begun to disturb the delightful hopes which I indulged, while I flattered myself with the prospect of passing with you the whole of life, there was not even in imagination, a happiness equal to mine. No chagrin, no uneasiness imbibited my days, which brought with them only an increase of happiness. I felt myself carried through life as upon a cloud. Scarcely did I touch the earth with my feet, I was surrounded with an azure sky, through which every object had a smiling aspect. If I had my eyes even gently suffused with tears at every word that I directed to you. In performing any piece of music, I was melted into tenderness, for I even addressed to you that mysterious language, those undescribable feelings which we derive from sympathy. I had within me a supernatural existence which you had conferred on me: I felt an inspiration of love and virtue, which made my heart beat with more emotion to every impulse of joy.

I was happy even in your absence: the hour when I was to see you approached, and I was agitated by the feverish feelings of hope. This fever was calmed the moment you entered my chamber. It gave place to the delicious sentiments which arose in my soul: I regarded you; I considered anew all the objects which surrounded me; overcome with the magic, with the enchantment of your presence, and asking Heaven whether such happiness was really enjoyed on earth, or whether I had quitted the regions of mortality. Was there no love in all this delirium of enjoyment? And when you folded me in your arms, when I reclined my head on your shoulder, if I concealed in my heart any of my emotions, the heart became more tender.

It would have lost even sensibility if I had not known how to restrain its force. I have wished, Leonce, never to see any thing in your pains, but your anxiety about my attachment to you. I have dispelled these anxieties. If you still continue to indulge in the same complaints, it will no longer be worthy of my character, to pay any attention to them.

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## LETTER XXXVIII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

My will is submitted to yours, but I know not what load of sorrow alters in me the principles of life. Yesterday, when returning from your house, I could with difficulty support myself on my horse. I shall endeavour to be at Bellerive this evening, but now I have hardly strength to write. Adieu.

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## LETTER XXXIX.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

LEONCE; I believe you are generous; why, then, should I conceal from you what is dangerous for me? You know, you ought to know, that if you rendered me criminal, I could not survive my infamy; and you know me well enough not to entertain an idea that I imitate the conduct of those deceitful women who yield after a long resistance. If you do not wish that I should die of grief and shame, I ought, while I disclose to you the secret of my weakness, to look up to you as the protector of my virtue. Oh, Leonce, if you suffer, if your sufferings sometimes impair your health, do not I beseech you, appear before me in that situation.

Yesterday, when I saw you pale and trembling, I felt my heart sink within me; as often as the image of your danger presented itself before me, every other idea disappeared. Yesterday I felt in my heart an indescribable emotion which weakened my reason and my virtue; which deprived me of all strength. I experienced an inexpressible desire to re-animate your life, at the expense of mine, to pour out my blood, that yours might be warmed, and that my last breath might infuse some heat into your trembling hands.

Leonce, while I avow to you the empire of your sufferings



over my heart, it is to entreat you never to suffer me to be a witness of them. Keep them from my sight, if it is possible: This prayer comes not from an unfeeling heart, and to address it to you is to give you the strongest proof of my esteem. Do not answer this letter. While I write, I feel my face covered with blushes. I have implored your protection. Protect me without putting me in mind that I have requested your support.

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## LETTER XL.

### LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

DELPHINE, I respect and yield to, your will. This resignation is all that I can promise to you. You know not the feelings which agitate me. I impose silence on them, I cannot confide them to you. I adore you, I am afraid to speak to you of love. What then is to become of me? You also love me, and you wish that I should be happy! I believed I should be happy; I was deceived. Let us endeavour no longer to speak of each other; let us endeavour to transport our thoughts to I know not what foreign subject, on which, by some effort, we may be enabled to employ ourselves. For I allow, that to converse on such a subject, will require some effort. Cannot I resist my inclinations? Cannot I give myself up to what I approve? If I pass another day in that situation, into which my desires and my regrets have plunged me: if I live another day in that situation, one of us is undone.

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## LETTER XLI.

### DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

MAD. de Mondeville's steward has called on mine, to speak to him of the sixty thousand livres, for the payment of which I was bound for Madame de Vernon, and forty thousand more which I lent her for a few months. You know well enough that I do not wish you to discharge these debts, more especially at present, when your affairs are in disorder; but it would be highly unsuitable for me to have the air of doing a service to Mad. de Mondeville. Alas! I have been guilty of

injuries to her; and if ever she discovers them, I am extremely unwilling that she should imagine that I wished to sooth her resentment by obligations of that nature. Have the goodness, therefore, to tell Mad. de Mondeville, that I do not wish for ten years, that there should be any settlement of the debts which her mother contracted with me; but persuade her that I am influenced by friendship for you, by regard for a promise I made to her mother. Suppose whatever you please; but only arrange every thing so that Madame de Mondeville may not believe herself personally bound to me by the ties of gratitude.

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## LETTER XLII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

I HAVE executed your orders faithfully respecting Mad. de Mondeville. Why do you speak of avoiding gratitude? Have you then forgotten that it is to you that she owes her dowry? that, without your fatal generosity, I should perhaps have been free? O! how can I banish this tormenting recollection, when every thing in life so forcibly brings it back to my thoughts?

I have not been able to prevent Matilda from going to see you to-morrow. She is much affected by your kindness to us; though, according to your desire, I have endeavoured to diminish its merit. She wished me to accompany her to Bellerive; but that is impossible. I do not wish to see you together; I do not wish to find her in the place which you inhabit. I should imagine that her image continued there. Suffer me to request of you, Delphine, to receive Matilda as you would have done before the death of her mother. You are likely to feel unnecessary emotion in her presence, as if you had really injured her. Alas! offer her my sufferings as a sacrifice. Are not these a sufficient sacrifice? preserve, with her, the superiority which belongs to you. It will be sufficient to give birth in her mind to suspicion. Never was she more calm or more happy; but the only person whom she observes with care is you: not from jealousy, but to confirm herself in the opinion that there is no happiness but in devotion; and that whatever is amiable and fascinating in your nature, is useless; because you do not entertain opinions similar to her own. Discover to her therefore, I beseech you, neither sadness nor timidity; and consider that to you, and you alone, she owes the manner in which she is treated by me. There is nothing about her which I am particularly

disposed to blame; but her character so little corresponds with mine, that I should have sought pretexts to withdraw from her, if you had not made some degree of attention to her happiness the condition of your presence. This happiness she enjoys from me, thank heaven! without compelling me to adopt the least dissimulation. She attends to nothing in life but external actions; as, in religion, she respects nothing but observances. She never renders herself uneasy about the accent, or the words which are a thousand times more involuntary than actions. She loves me, I believe; and if certain striking circumstances excited her jealousy, I believe she would experience the bitterest affliction: but while I never fail to see her every day, she never can imagine that my heart is engaged by another. Her repose, as well as your own dignity, my dear Delphine, therefore requires that you should make no change in your usual mode of intercourse with her. Adieu; you triumph: how can I sufficiently restrain myself? I speak as if my heart were calm.—Delphine, alas! a day will come, when, should all these efforts prove vain, it will be necessary to choose between life and love: ah! what sentence would you then pronounce?

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## LETTER XLIII.

### DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

WHAT cruel moments have I passed! Matilda came here at six in the evening, and did not leave me till nine. I believe she had before hand allotted these three hours to this visit, but they were painful beyond any thing of which I can form an idea. I dreaded hypocrisy in testifying friendship to her. I knew it was imprudent and unjust to treat her with coldness, and yet each word I pronounced was the result both of deliberation and doubt. I could not at the same time avoid observing and comparing her with myself; and I was dissatisfied with different impressions, alternately made by the beauty she possesses, and the graces she wants; but the friendship of our infancy at last prevailed with me. I felt myself melted into tenderness by her presence, though she had done nothing to excite that feeling.

She inquired respecting my designs, and I told her that I should return in the spring to Languedoc. It was impossible for me to reply to her otherwise; I know not how I happened to make this answer, when no preceding reflection had suggested such a design.

Matilda testified more interest towards me, than ever I observed in her conduct before. I felt so much from her kind-

ness, that had it belonged to her character to express herself with more sensibility, I should perhaps have thrown myself at her feet by a spontaneous movement, which neither my will nor my reason could control. But you know her manner: she checks confidence, by obliging others to repress their feelings as she represses her own. The only moment in which she displayed any animation, and abandoned the uniform and precise manner she always preserves, was when she spoke to me of you. "All my happiness is placed in him," said she, "I have no other affection on this earth."—These words affected me greatly, and my eyes were filled with tears: but then Matilda dreading, like her mother, every thing that may lead to emotion, rose suddenly and asked some questions respecting the arrangements of my house.

From this moment we talked only on the most indifferent subjects, and we separated after three hours' earnest discourse, as if we had only conversed for some minutes in the midst of a numerous circle. During that time, however, she was calm, but how different was my situation! I was afraid to be alone after her departure. Is it possible for me not to perceive in the torments I endure, the cruel symptoms of self-disapprobation!

This morning, I received a letter from Madame d'Ervin, which announces her arrival in a month, and speaks with esteem and confidence of the satisfaction she feels in intrusting me with the education of her daughter. Tell me, my friend, can I accept such a charge? What sort of example will I now have before her in my house? How shall I be able to convince her of my innocence, when I must above all things advise her not to imitate my conduct? Not one woman in a thousand could escape the seductions to which I expose myself. I am not yet criminal, Leonce, but I already blush when hear the names of women mentioned, who are. I experience a blameable pleasure, when I hear of some traits of weakness of the heart in others. I sometimes detect myself in a wish to believe that virtue no longer exists. Formerly I was consistent with myself, now I constantly reason with myself, as if I had some one to convince. When I ask myself, to whom I address these repeated discourses, I feel that I wished to drown the voice of my conscience.

If I persist long in this situation, my friend, I shall blunt in my heart that pure and lively delicacy, the slightest intimations from which, used always to determine my conduct. What interest can I place in the remains of moral rectitude I still preserve, if I allow the feelings of my soul to become dead, in consequence of my ceasing to aspire to that perfect virtue, which has hitherto always been the object of my most ardent hope? Leonce, I love you to idolatry: when I see you, I fancy myself transported into a world of ideal felicity, and

yet I wish I had the resolution to separate myself from you. I have wished to make this heroic sacrifice to morality, and to the Supreme Being; I was desirous that the recollections and the love, with which those have inspired me, should be for ever engraven on a soul, rendered sublime by the most noble example of courage!

Oh! my friend, why do you not join with my generous emotions! One day holding each other firm, we shall present ourselves with confidence before the Creator of nature. The just man struggling with adversity, has been pronounced a spectacle worthy of heaven; sensible beings triumphing over love, merit still more the approbation of the Deity! Aid me, dear Leonce, I may again become myself, but if you persist, I shall soon be nothing more than a character borne down by the weight of repentance, a gentle soul, but one of a common cast: and the most noble power of the heart, that of making sacrifices, will, in me, be for ever in-feeble.

In short, I know not whether I ought not to separate from you, even on your own account? Have you not for some time been cruelly agitated? Can I, alas! can I even say that it is for your happiness, that your unfortunate Delphine degrades her heart, by stifling her remorse?

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## LETTER XLIV.

### LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

THE trouble in which sentiments too powerful to be resisted have involved me, perhaps, merited the letter you have written; but I did not expect it. I spoke to you of what was wanting to my happiness, and you propose to separate from me! How faint then must be the idea I have given you of my love! Has it been possible for you to imagine that I could exist for a moment after you were lost to me! I know not whether you ought to experience the regret and remorse which agitate you; I ask nothing, I require nothing; but I merely wish, that you should read my feelings in my soul. No human power, no order of yours, could induce me to support life, if I ceased to see you. It is for you to consider what that life is worth, and what interests you will prefer to it! I shall not murmur against your decision, if you clearly understand what you pronounce.

In the midst of the happiness I enjoy from your presence, I constantly feel that sorrow is not far distant from me, and that

it may perhaps penetrate my soul with a force which will be the greater in consequence of the happy moments by which it has been suspended.

Delphine, I am twenty-five, and I already begin to view the future period of my life as a long perspective, the colours of which must fade in proportion as it is advanced. Is it your wish that I should renounce it? I shall obey you without reluctance, but never speak to me of separation. Say to me, *I believe thy death necessary*, my heart will not revolt at the determination; but I shall always experience a sort of irritation against you when you speak of your never seeing me more, as a possible state of existence.

I was wrong, my love, to speak to you of my anxieties; pardon my distraction. By presenting a horrible idea to my mind you have made me feel how foolish I was to complain! Alas! is it then only through sorrow that reason can enter the heart of man? Is it grief alone that can teach us to reproach ourselves for too ambitious desires? Well! well! speak no more of absence, and I shall be satisfied.

Can I ever forget the pleasure I enjoy in intrusting you with my most secret thoughts? Let us regard together the events of the world, as strangers taking a distant view, and sufficient for each other; every thing beyond ourselves will form only subjects for observation. Ah! Delphine, I would with thee accept immortality on this earth. The generations which shall succeed us, will only fill my soul with a melancholy, but pleasing sadness. I will continually renew with you my feelings and my sentiments; I will enjoy a new life from every interview.

My friend, let us eradicate from our minds every anxiety to which our imagination might give birth. In the world there is nothing real but love! Every thing else disappears, or changes its form and importance according to the particular disposition of our mind; but violence cannot be offered to the feelings of love, without offering violence to life itself. It regulates, it inspires every interest, and every action. The soul which it fills knows not what path to pursue, and all idea of the divisions of time being lost, every hour no longer presents to him any employment, object, or enjoyment.

Believe me, Delphine, there is in love a certain portion of virtue; there is virtue in that sacrifice of one's self to a lover, which you so strongly condemn; but how can you believe yourself culpable; you whose actions and heart are guided by the purest innocence. How can you blush for yourself when I am penetrated with such profound admiration for your character and conduct. Judge of your virtues as of your charms by the love which I feel for you. It is not your beauty alone which has excited it; your moral perfections have inspired me with that enthusiasm which alternately inflames and combats

my desires. Oh! my friend, abjure your letter, be proud of being beloved, and do not repent of devoting your life to me.

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## LETTER XLV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, April 2, 1791.

You write to me seldom, my dear Louisa, and you avoid speaking of Leonce. Affection breathes as usual in your letters, but they disclose a secret sentiment of blame. Ah! you are just, I have merited that blame. I have lost the moment for a conscious sacrifice. You will judge yourself whether it is now possible. I send you the last letter I received from Leonce. Can I leave him after such dreadful menaces. I know that every woman in love supposes she is in a situation which never before existed; but notwithstanding, are you not convinced that the sentiment Leonce entertains for me, is unexampled in the world!

That profound tenderness in so strong a mind, that neglect of every distinction in a character which seemed to consider it a duty to prosecute with ardour the honours of life, are circumstances which must have long since, struck you. What man was ever better calculated to aspire to every species of glory? The nobleness of his expressions, the dignity of his attentions, so excite my admiration, that I often delight to feel that I am inferior to him. No triumph ever afforded me so much enjoyment, as I have experienced in humbling my character before that of Leonce! who can estimate all, that he is already, and all that he may yet become? I still suspect that there exists beyond the perfections I admire, others of which I am ignorant; and when he employs the most ardent expressions, the dignity of his manner, the slight reserve that appears in his accent, persuades me that, still remain in his heart, sentiments more profound, than those he allows himself to utter. Leonce possesses over me an all powerful influence, arising at once from his mind, his character, and his love. It seems to me, that I am as much born to obey, as to adore him. I merely reproach myself for the passion with which he inspires me; but when in his presence, the involuntary emotion of my soul, is to believe myself criminal, if I cannot render him happy, his looks, his voice, his words, all seem to bear the stamp of virtue, and to dictate to me her laws. When he speaks to me, I fancy I experience that pleasure which the heart enjoys in embracing any generous design; and when in a noble transport, he tells me that he must sacrifice his life to love, I blush for myself, if I do not share his enthusiasm.

Fear not, however, that his empire over me, should ever render me criminal. The same sentiment which subjects me to his will, protects me against shame. No! Leonce commands my destiny, because I admire his character, and because he unites all the virtues which you have taught me to cherish. I cannot leave him, if he himself does not consent to that sacrifice; but, when forgetting the difference of our duties, he would make me fail in mine, I am even with his own qualities to oppose him, and certain that he never will sacrifice his honour to his love, the desire of equalling him, inspires me with the courage to resist him. Doubtless, Louisa, there is little to boast of in preserving a last virtue, when so many duties have already been braved, which formerly appeared to me as sacred as those I still respect. But do not continue this cruel silence respecting my situation. Do not allow yourself to believe that the time is past for giving me advice, or that I am past receiving any! I shall follow it perhaps some time: I promise nothing, however, but I hope you will always love me.

Alas! our situation may in a moment be completely changed. I shall depart, if Matilda, discovering our sentiments, wishes that I should remove; I shall depart, if Leonce ceases for a day to respect me; or if opinions should so far pursue me, as to render him unhappy: Ah! in how many ways foreseen or unforeseen may the happiness I only tremblingly enjoy be torn from me? Be not in haste then Louisa, to exhibit to me that tone of coldness and reserve which ought only to be assumed towards too prosperous friends. Forget not compassion, I shall perhaps soon have to ask it of you.

You have already given me much uneasiness, by informing me that M. de Valorbe is coming to Paris, in consequence of the death of his mother. I ought then to make known to Leonce, both his sentiments for me and his claims to my gratitude; but, in whatever manner I must make this communication, his presence will always be disagreeable to Leonce. Cannot you, then, divert M. de Valorbe from his intention of coming here? You know that, under the form of timidity and constraint he conceals a character of severe and sombre self-love; and that all he says respecting his disgust of life, arises from his having an opinion of himself which he cannot make others adopt. He has more understanding than he is capable of displaying, and that is precisely the reverse of the character which is necessary for succeeding in Paris, where nobody will take time to discover the merit of his neighbour. Though he should not be able to learn my real sentiments, he would suffer enough from the superiority of Leonce to irritate him; and it is not easy to foresee what misfortunes might thence arise! Try to persuade him, my dear Louisa, that nothing can ever induce me to marry again. I cannot sufficiently express



to you the pain I should experience on seeing M. de Valorbe, if I must endure to hear him still speak of his love. Besides, my visitors are now so few, that, by adding M. de Valorbe to the number, I should expose myself to the suspicion of favouring his addresses.

My habitual companions are M. and Madame de Lebensei; sometimes I see, but less frequently, M. and Madame de Belmont. The mind of M. de Lebensei pleases me extremely, his conversation becomes every day more agreeable. Neither prejudice nor the spirit of party induce him to adopt any opinion; and he employs his reason only in the examination of every question. The society of a man of this sort promises you always security and interest; you are not afraid of intrusting him with your sentiments, because you are certain of finding them either confirmed or rectified on hearing him.

The mind of Madame de Lebensei is inferior to that of her husband; but, above all, she possesses far less equanimity. Her situation in society renders her unhappy, though she will not avow it even to herself. This uneasiness is much augmented, in consequence of an inquietude which is very natural and very important at the present moment. She is in the last stage of her pregnancy; and she has reason to believe that her grandmother and her aunt, who are both great *devotees*, will not acknowledge her child. She has told me, without explaining herself farther, that she wishes me to do her a favour with her relations, who are also in some degree mine. I shall be happy to comply with her request; for I really wish to do her a service. She is frequently ashamed of her sorrows, and is discontented with her sensibility, the enjoyments of which are not capable of making her forget her other pains. She fears least her husband should perceive her chagrin, and assumes an air of gaiety every time he looks at her. Madame de Belmont, with a blind and ruined husband, enjoys a far more pure state of felicity: she lives no more in the world than Madame de Lebensei, but she does not feel herself detached from it. Solitude is her choice; but poor Eliza is condemned to it. I complain of her, because she gives way to regret; for, in her situation, I should be perfectly happy. She believes, and justly believes, that she is innocent. She has espoused him she loves, and yet the opinion of others torment her—What weakness!

Adieu, dear sister; do not abandon me. Let us resume our habit of daily correspondence. I do not entertain a sentiment which I would not communicate to you, and which your tender and indulgent heart may not in confidence accept.

## LETTER XLVI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

THE nephew of Madame du Marset, is menaced with the loss of his regiment, for having, it is said, made a declaration of his sentiments in opposition to the revolution. M. de Le-bensei has much interest with the democratic deputies of the Constituent Assembly; and Madame du Marset has requested me to beg that you will prevail on him to use his influence in favour of her relation. If M. d'Orsan lose his regiment, he will be disappointed of a rich marriage, which, in the present situation of his fortune, is indispensably necessary to him. I know what the conduct of Madame du Marset has been, both towards you and me; but I am well pleased to give you an opportunity of a vengeance sufficiently satisfactory to offended dignity; for it is not merely from motives of bounty that we serve those of whose conduct we have reason to complain. We enjoy their humiliation when they solicit; and there is a pleasure in acquiring the right of despising those who have excited our resentment: but that reason is not the only one which makes me desire that you should do this service for Madame du Marset.

You know, though we seldom speak on the subject of the violence of the present political disputes, it has frequently been asserted, and Madame du Marset has greatly contributed to circulate the report, that you are enthusiastically attached to the principles of the French revolution. It seems to me, therefore, that it is peculiarly proper you should render yourself useful to its enemies: such conduct would contradict all that has been said against you in that respect. On looking at the course of political events in France, I every day more anxiously wish that you may not be suspected of interesting yourself in the success of those who direct them.

You require that I shall accompany Matilda to Mondeville. I would have sooner obtained from her than from you, permission to dispense with the journey. Do you know that it will detain me more than a week? Have you reflected how much it will cost me to obey you? All the torments of absence forgotten for three months are again brought to my recollection. I beg of you to be faithful to your promise of writing punctually. I know before-hand, the days that await me. They will be without object and without hope, if I receive not a letter from you. Shakspeare has said

Life is as dull as a twice told dream.

Ah! how true is this of the days that are past in the absence of Delphine: how disgusting is the return of the same dulness and the same regrets.

Adieu, my love: I am in a state of profound melancholy: When I ask myself the cause of this melancholy, I feel it proceeds from the conviction that these eight days veil from me the rest of futurity. You have ventured to think of leaving me; speak no more of such a purpose: I hope you have never seriously entertained the idea. You have made use of it to alarm me respecting my wanderings, and perhaps you have succeeded. Adieu.

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## LETTER XLVII.

### DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

M. DE LEBENSEI settled the affair of M. d'Orsan in a few hours after he received my letter: you may, my dear Leonce, inform Madame du Marset of this. I have no desire in the world to take any merit in the transaction with respect to her, for if I did it would be usurped. I have served her because you desired it, and not on account of the motives which you recommended to me. Doubtless, I think with you, that it is proper, if we have it in our power, to be useful to our enemies; but as the means of individuals are very limited, I never think of doing good to my enemies until I am certain that none of my friends want my services. To condemn to gratitude, persons against whom we have just reason to complain, is a pleasure which belongs to self-love! but the enjoyments of pride can never be reckoned among the number of good actions.

As to the interest I might have in gaining the affection of those who differ with me in opinion, that is an advantage I set no value on, except with regard to you. I detest the animosities of party; I am incapable of them, and though I ardently and sincerely love liberty, I have not given way to that enthusiasm, because it would have carried me into the midst of passions in which a woman ought not to be involved. But as I never can disavow my opinions, I could not avoid experiencing more reluctance than pleasure, in the performance of any service, which might have the air of an expiation: besides, this endeavour never would obtain its object, whenever a calculation has any share in a generous action, the calculation is certain to fail.

I shall transcribe a passage, on this subject, from M. de Lebensei's letter, in answer to mine:—"We ought to do all in

our power to diminish the numberless misfortunes which a revolution produces, and which are most severely felt by those who oppose it; but in general, little reliance is to be placed on the gratitude of such persons. Two months ago I took a great deal of trouble to relieve from prison, a man whom I knew not, but who nearly lost his life for a political offence of which he was accused. I learned yesterday that he has every where represented me as a man whose activity is of a very dangerous nature. I have requested one of my friends to remind him that if it had not been for this pretended activity, he would not now have been in existence, and that it ought therefore to meet at least with some indulgence from him. Such a disappointment, however, is of little importance to me, for I am equally indifferent as to what those I do not love, either say or think of me. I only mention the circumstance to show you that a party man is ingenious in discovering reasons for hating any person of a different opinion, to whom he may have been obliged; and perhaps it often happens that to relieve himself from a troublesome feeling of gratitude, he invents a thousand calumnies which he never would have thought of, had the parties remained altogether strangers to each other." M. de Lebensei goes, perhaps, a little too far, in expressing himself thus, but I wished you should understand, dear Leonce, that I have served Mad. du Marset to please you, and without any other motive of interest. It appears to me, that M. de Lebensei paid great respect to your name in this affair. I believe he would be very happy to form an intimacy with you; when you return, shall I bring you together by an invitation to dine with me?

You see, my friend, this letter is altogether on the business in which you engaged me for Mad. du Marset: I should have wished, however, to have said a few words on the pain I suffer from your absence. When I have to pass the close of the day alone on the spot where I used to enjoy the happiness of seeing you, I become a prey to the most cruel reflections. Alas! those who have no reason to reproach themselves, may calmly support a temporary separation, but when dissatisfied with ourselves, the illusion which overcomes that feeling, can only be created in the presence of him we love. Take care, however, not to afflict Matilda by returning before her. Consider that to calm my remorse, it is necessary that I should be constantly able to say to myself that my sentiments do not injure her, and that even at my solicitation you often render attentions, which, perhaps, were it not for me, you would neglect.

## LETTER XLVIII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Mondeville, April 20.

BEFORE I leave Mondeville, my love, I wish to enter into an explanation with you on part of your letter, for I could not think of devoting any of the moments we pass together, to the discussion of the interests of life. I shall always do what you desire, but, unless you require it, I wish to avoid connecting myself with M. de Lebensei. In consequence of the present events, I may find myself engaged, though with regret, in a civil war, and in that case I shall, doubtless, join the party which is hostile to that of M. de Lebensei.

I have several times told you, that the political disputes which now prevail, do not excite in me any sensation of anger. My mind has no difficulty in comprehending the motives which may influence the defenders of the revolution; but I do not think it would become a man of my rank, to unite with those who wish to destroy the order of nobles. In associating with them, I should appear either to be their dupè, a character always ridiculous, or to range myself by calculation with the strongest party. And I detest force, even when it supports reason. If I had the misfortune to hold the opinions of the strongest side, I should be silent.

There are, however, sentiments which must determine my conduct in the present circumstances. I admit, that following my own judgment, I would not have made it a point of honour, to support the privileges of the nobility, but since the heads of the most ancient and distinguished families have decided, that their privileges ought to be maintained: that is sufficient to make me abhor the idea of passing for a democrat; but though in explaining my motives, I could justify myself a thousand times better, I never would admit an explanation to be necessary on any subject connected with my respect for my ancestors, and the duties they have transmitted to me. Were I a man of letters, I should conscientiously endeavour to disclose those philosophical truths, which will perhaps be one day universally acknowledged; but when a man possesses a character, which endures censure with impatience, he ought not to expose himself to be blamed by his contemporaries, or the individuals of the class to which he belongs. Even the glory which might be bestowed by posterity, would not compensate for such a sacrifice; but there is evidently at this moment, no idea of

glory among the partisans of liberty ; for the means they employ to attain their object, are so unworthy, that they must prove injurious to individuals, though they should, which I do not believe, tend to promote their cause.

You love liberty with a generous, and I may even say, romantic feeling, as it is connected with political institutions. Your imagination has decorated these institutions with all those historical recollections which are calculated to produce enthusiasm. You love liberty, as you love poetry, as you love religion, as you love every thing capable of ennobling and exalting human nature! Ideas which are generally supposed to be foreign to the character of women, are found perfectly consistent with your amiable nature and sense, when you discover them to be intimately united with the dignity and delicacy of your soul. Still, however, it always gives me pain to hear you mentioned as the friend of the revolution. I think that a woman cannot have too much aristocracy either in her opinions or in the choice of her society ; and every thing which tends to create a greater distance between you and others, appears to be more suitable to your sex and your rank. It is also my opinion, that it becomes you best to join the party of those that are victims. Finally, and this of all motives is that which influences me the most, in the class of society in which we live, too many enemies must be made by adopting the political opinions which prevail at present ; and I am always afraid that you will suffer from the envy which they excite.

I hope, my dear Delphine, I have not abused the deference with which you so kindly regard me, by this attempt to advise you ? But I feel for you a perfect union of all the sentiments the heart can experience. I would be at once your protector and your lover. I wish at the same time to direct and admire you. I believe myself called upon to conduct through the world, an angel who is not yet perfectly acquainted with the path she ought to pursue, and allows a mortal who adores her to guide her steps far from those earthly snares which are unknown in the heaven from which she descended. Adieu, I am already relieved from three days of ten I was condemned to pass at a distance from you.

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## LETTER XLIX.

DELPHINE TO LEONOR.

Bellerive, April 24.

I wish not to combat your arguments. My respect for your excellent qualities, and even for your faults, forbids me from

ever opposing any opinion in which you believe your honour in the slightest degree engaged. But when you pronounce the horrible words "*civil war*," can I avoid being profoundly afflicted at the little importance you attach to individual conviction in political questions? You speak of deciding between two parties, as if it were an affair of choice, as if we were not invincibly determined to espouse one or the other by motives of interest, and the feelings of the soul.

I have no destiny but that of pleasing you; I never can have any other. You may, therefore, be certain that I shall carefully avoid manifesting any opinion which you would not wish to see me express: but were I a man, it would be as impossible for me not to love liberty and not to serve it, as to shut my heart against generosity, friendship, and all the most pure and exalted sentiments that honour human nature. It is not merely the lights of philosophy which produce those ideas: there is mingled with them a generous enthusiasm, which, like all noble and dignified passions, when it takes possession of the mind, governs it imperiously. You would have experienced this impression, had not the opinions of your mother and those of the Spanish grandees among whom you lived during your infancy inspired you, for the defence of the order of nobles, with sentiments which you ought, perhaps, to have consecrated to the whole of the nation: but this is saying enough of your opinions. It is above all, important to me to consider your conduct.

What! Leonce could you be capable of drawing your sword against your fellow citizens in favour of a cause in which you feel no enthusiastic interest? I shall urge against you the very objection you make to the party which supports the revolution. "*It is the strongest*," you say, "*and I would not be suspected of yielding to force*;" but do you not also fear that you may be accused of being determined by your personal interest in defending the privileges of the nobles? Believe me whatever opinion you may embrace, its enemies will easily find the means of wounding that feeling you cherish, by the motives they will not fail to ascribe to you. It is necessary, therefore, to regulate our conduct by our own reason and conscience. Do what we may, our adversaries will always endeavour to tarnish the lustre of actions springing from the purest motives. It is above all impossible to conciliate public opinion in our favour, when any species of enthusiasm necessarily divides society into two opposing parties. Every thing proves, as I have often observed to you, that we never can be certain of our conduct or happiness if we depend on the opinions of others. But be that as it may, at present I wish to convince you, that as you are not fully persuaded of the justice of the cause you propose to support; you have no right to shed a single drop of your blood, of that blood which is mine, for an

opinion which you may think right ; but which no strong conviction has produced in your mind. Your duty, according to your manner of thinking, consists in political inaction, and all my happiness is connected with the fulfilment of that duty. Ah! my friend, renounce those passions which appear factitious, when compared with the only natural emotion which fills the whole soul, and changes, as by a sort of enchantment, all we perceive into a source of delightful emotions! Yield political interests to the power of love. Let us forget the destiny of empires for our own. There is a kind of selfishness which is excusable in the minds of sensibility. He who concentrates himself in his affections, may, without remorse, detach himself from the rest of the world.

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## LETTER L.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

Bellerive, April 26th.

MY FRIEND,

I WISH to take no step without consulting you. Alas! I know too well what a contrary conduct has cost me.

Madame de Lebensei was delivered eight hours ago, of a son. I went to see her this morning, and expected to find her in the happiest moment of her life; but the reasons she has for fearing that her family will not acknowledge her child, overwhelm with sorrow the pure enjoyment of maternal love. She proposes to act in a manner at once simple and noble, to go herself to her grandmother and aunt, and lay her child at their feet; but she is desirous that I should accompany her. These old ladies are my relations, and as I have always treated them with the greatest respect and attention, they are well disposed towards me. Madame de Lebensei trembled while she made this request, and I perceived from the state she was in, that she considered my compliance of the greatest importance. An involuntary emotion induced me to give my consent. I saw her in anguish, and I could not withhold consolation. A moment after, however, reflection seemed to suggest to me, that there was a kind of distant resemblance between this hasty resolution and my easy condescension for Theresa. I shuddered at this recollection, but it was impossible to deprive Madame de Lebensei of a hope which she entertained so ardently; it was almost become her right; I continued therefore to speak to her of indifferent matter, in order that she might suppose I meditated on the



promise I had made. On coming home, however, I resolved to submit this promise to your will. Give me a positive answer on the subject before you return.

I cannot conceal from you, that it will give me infinite pain to appear deficient in generosity towards Madame de Lebensei, and to lose the esteem of her husband, whom I greatly respect. He has completely terminated in the handsomest manner, the affair of Madame du Marset, which I recommended to him in your name. To appear cold and selfish, to assume a character so contrary to my natural disposition, is one of the severest sacrifices to which I could condemn myself. To avoid the opportunity of performing an essential service, of greatly promoting the happiness of another, seems to me the same as rejecting a benefit from heaven. But notwithstanding this, even my sympathy, even that sentiment which I never before repressed, I am ready to emulate to you. If you require me to discontinue my intercourse with Monsieur and Madame Lebensei, I shall do it.

How does it happen that you still allow harsh complaints to escape you in your last letter.\* Ah! Leonce, shall our happiness continue? I think I see a storm which menaces us, approaching. Would I were dead before it burst on our heads!

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## LETTER LI.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE,

Mondeville, April, 29.

I WOULD not repress the generous emotions of your soul, my love; I trust no evil will result from this affair. I should have been glad that Madame de Lebensei had not made the request, but since you have given your promise, I think with you that there are no honourable means, by which you can avoid fulfilling it. Adieu, my Delphine! notwithstanding my solicitations, Madame de Mondeville will not leave this for four days. I therefore shall not be at Bellerive until the fourth of May, at seven o'clock.

\* This letter is lost.

## LETTER LII.

MADAME DE LEBENSEI TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Cernay, May 2.

You have restored me, madam, to the happiness, of which I was threatened to be for ever deprived! I could not support the idea of my son not being acknowledged by my family, and to bring about an event I so much desired. I had exhausted all the means, which a character not destitute of spirit would permit to suggest. But you appeared, and every one was instantly changed. Old age, prejudice, embarrassment, arising from a long discord, all yielded to the power of your irresistible eloquence, and the genuine sensibility you displayed. I shall never forget the moment, when throwing yourself on your knees before my grandmother, and presenting my infant, she spread her aged hands on the beautiful ringlets which adorn your head, and blessed you as her daughter. Ah! how I wish to see you happy. Will not the prayers of all those whom your generosity has protected, prove at last efficacious?

M. de Lebensei is profoundly grateful for this obligation you have conferred upon us. He never has spoken of you since he knew you, but with the highest admiration. Allow me to tell you, that we never pass a day without mutually regretting that Leonce is the husband of Matilda.

If among the events which the revolution may be expected to produce, M. de Mondeville, should, like me, find the means of dissolving so unequal a union, my husband would be very zealous in advising him to such a step! But what signifies our fruitless wishes? They can only prove to you that we feel a lively interest in your fate. Think with kindness, madam, of the family at Cernay to which you have given internal peace: that benefit which would have consoled us for the loss of every other had been ravished from us but for you.

## LETTER LIII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 5, 1791.

I HAVE enjoyed the pleasure, my dear Louisa, of reconciling Madame de Lebensei with her family, but this agreeable sen-

timent is now troubled by one which gives me great uneasiness.

Leonce arrived yesterday morning from Mondeville, and I expected to see him in the course of the day, but at eight o'clock a man on horseback arrived to inform me that he could not come; and also told me that he had left Leonce in a very numerous company at Madame du Marset's: Madame de Mondeville was not there, and the messenger who came to me was also directed to order his coach to come for him at one in the morning. How could it happen that he should have so easily resolved not to see me after a fortnight's absence? Why has he not written a single word to me? Can he be displeased with my interference in favour of Madame de Lebensei, though he consented to it, and knows its success?

Louisa, I have already greatly suffered, but if the heart of Leonce becomes indifferent to me, will you who have blamed my conduct, think that Heaven has justly punished me? No—you will not say so. Had I committed the greatest crimes, they would thus be more than expiated. But why those painful fears? May he not have been detained by some business, by some difficulty? Ah! if he begins to calculate on business or on obstacles—If I am no more to him than one of the common interests of life, receiving, like them, his attention in my turn, I will not, at that rate, submit to the kind of existence, he imposes upon me. It is only by inspiring him with an enthusiastic and impassioned sentiment, that I can raise myself in my own estimation, notwithstanding the blame to which I expose myself. No—if I am reduced to experience only the esteem, the attentions on the moderated affection of Leonce, sorrow and glory of sacrifices is for me the noblest course. I feel, Louisa, that I acquit myself ill in unfolding this idea, and I can, with difficulty, turn my attention to any other.

Madame d'Erwins says, that she will return to Bellerive in less than three weeks, to resign her daughter to me before she takes the veil. M. de Serbellane having no longer any hope of inducing her to change her design, has gone to England, where he exists, plunged in the most profound melancholy. Generous, unfortunate man! Oh! Louisa, sometimes I persuade myself that the Supreme Being abandons the world to the wicked, and reserves the immortality of the soul for the just only. The wicked may enjoy some years of pleasure, the virtuous may endure long sufferings; but the prosperity of the former ends in annihilation, and the adversity of the latter conducts them to eternal felicity. Pleasing idea! it would console me for every evil except that of not being loved; for imagination itself could not then form any idea of future happiness.

How much am I affected by the last letter you wrote me! You repeat your pressing request for an account of all the de-

tails of my life—of that life which you disapprove, and which continues to retard the moment in which I should join you. Oh! it is you who best know how to love; you who never show either caprice, prejudice, or neglect; it, indeed, is you ———Alas! shall I already believe that it is no longer to be expected from him!

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## LETTER LIV.

### MADAME D'ARTENAS TO DELPHINE.

Paris, May 5.

It is really painful to me, my dear Delphine, to find myself always under the necessity of communicating matters which must give you uneasiness; but the delicacy of M. de Mondeville would, perhaps, induce him to conceal from you what passed last night; and it is absolutely necessary you should know it. My niece, who is to dine in the valley of Montmorenci, will deliver my letter this morning, as she passes your gate.

I arrived yesterday at Madame du Marset's nearly at the same time as Leonce. He came to announce to the mistress of the house, that her nephew would be continued in the command of his regiment. She returned him many thanks, and begged he would spend the evening with her; but he refused.

There is in society a very remarkable resemblance between the females of Paris, who have the greatest influence from their age, their aristocratic notions, or their devotion; and there is not one of them who can free herself from these three great sources of dignity, with the view of appearing amiable. Leonce, I believe, felt a sufficient portion of *ennui* till the short time which he had allotted to this visit had elapsed. He was standing before the chimney, conversing with four or five gentlemen, when your name, pronounced in a low tone of voice among the ladies, attracted his attention. He did not immediately turn round, but he left off talking, that he might listen more attentively, and he heard Madame du Marset distinctly utter the following words:—"Do you know that Madame d'Albemar has been in person to present to Madame de Cernay the little bastard of her grand-daughter, Madame de Lebensei? a singular employment for a young woman of twenty." M. de Mondeville turned round with a good deal of impetuosity, but instantly checking his warmth to give greater proofs of his contempt, he coolly requested Madame du Marset to repeat what she had just now said: this request he uttered in a tone of haughtiness and indignation which made Madame du Mar-

set and those who witnessed the commencement of this affair tremble. Madame du Marset was disconcerted; Madame de Tesin, who encourages her in her ill-natured remarks, and whose character possesses much more energy than hers, gave her a look which plainly intimated that she ought to make some reply. On this signal, Madame du Marset said: "You know well enough, sir, that Madame de Lebensei cannot be regarded as lawfully married; thus——" "I know not," interrupted M. de Mondeville, "on what absurd principles you imagine that a woman, who has divorced her former husband, according to the established laws of that country where he lived, is not entitled to consider herself free; but this I know, that Madame d'Albemar's having received Madame de Lebensei into her society, ought sufficiently to justify you in receiving her as a woman of character, if she were to come into your company."

Madame du Marset could not defend herself; she grew pale, and with her eyes seemed to look round for support. Madame de Tesin, with her usual sagacity, perceived that to interest a certain part of the company, in behalf of Madame du Marset, it was necessary to call in the aid of party spirit.—"As for me," said she, "what I never can account for is, that Madame d'Albemar is on an intimate footing with a man who entertains such detestable political opinions, as M. de Lebensei." "Madame du Marset," replied M. de Mondeville, with a good deal of point, "knows better than any one else, the reasons which ought to attach her to M. de Lebensei. It is to him that her nephew, M. d'Orsan, owes the continuance of the command of his regiment, and it was solely from the request of Madame d'Albemar, that he interfered in the business, for, of Madame du Marset, he has no sort of knowledge. I have received twenty notes from her, entreating me, to prevail upon me, to ask my cousin, Madame d'Albemar, to make the application to M. de Lebensei. She did so, and she succeeded. While her ineffable goodness is employed in reuniting a divided family, it is Madame du Marset who takes upon her to blame the conduct of my cousin. But I have done," said he; "it is sufficient for me to have shown to those who hear me, that malicious insinuations, originating in envy and ingratitude, scarcely deserve the notice of a man of honour."

M. de Fierville discovered some degree of shame, at thus witnessing the humiliation of his friend, Madame du Marset. He had several times looked to M. d'Orsan, as if to conjure him to undertake the defence of his aunt, but as he persisted in his silence, M. de Fierville, though seventy years old, could not help saying to Leonce, "you will have considerable difficulty, sir, in succeeding in your object, if you wish to prevent every one from speaking of the numberless imprudencies of Madame d'Albemar. It will not be enough to impose silence

on women." At these words, Leonce alternately turned red and pale with rage. Unwilling to have any dispute with a person of M. de Fierville's age, he advanced to the middle of the circle, and, though he appeared to address himself to M. de Fierville, he fixed his eyes on M. d'Orsan. "You are in the right," said he, "old men and females have nothing to do on the present occasion, and I only wish that a young man would make the same assertion, which the feebleness of your age permits you to do with impunity." These words were uttered with a turn of the head, expressive of the greatest *ferté*; a profound silence succeeded. This silence every one felt to be embarrassing, but no one had the courage to break it.

M. d'Orsan, though naturally brave, had no desire to fight with Leonce, and probably afterwards with M. de Lebensei, in support of the assertions of his aunt. He assumed a vacant air, played with Madame du Marset's little dog, which alone, in the midst of this scene, had the courage to keep up its usual noise; he approached with eagerness to the party where I was, as if he had been extremely anxious to enjoy my conversation. Madame de Tesin, greatly exasperated at the triumph of Leonce, got up hastily and walked across the room, for the purpose of speaking to M. d'Orsan. This was done in a manner so remarkable, that every one immediately perceived her object to be to endeavour to prevail upon the nephew of Madame du Marset to make some answer to Leonce. A lady who was in conversation with M. d'Orsan, involuntarily stretched out her arms, as if for the purpose of preventing the approach of Madame de Tesin. She, however, was totally engrossed with this feeling, and taking M. d'Orsan aside, she whispered to him with great earnestness. Leonce, who did not for a moment lose sight of what was going forward, turned round to Madame du Marset, and said to her, with a smile of the most contemptuous sarcasm, "I accept, madam, the invitation you have given me. I shall continue here the remainder of the evening, for I wish to allow time," added he, in a tone of voice considerably louder, "to some persons who seem to be deliberating about their plan of operations." He then went out to give some orders to his servants, and in passing by the door he saluted Madame de Tesin and M. d'Orsan with an air of disdain which could not fail to give them offence.

During the momentary absence of Leonce, some ladies, resuming that courage which his presence had overawed, began to talk a little louder, and eagerly said: "you see that *M. de Mondeville loves Madame d'Albemar; it is clear that he makes a return to her love; she lives at Bellerive only to receive his visits more freely.*" Leonce returned, and they instantly became silent, discovering at the same time, the

most ludicrous dismay. But M. de Mondeville has such an ascendancy over every one, that minds not of his cast, are terrified at his anger, even without forming any opinion of the effects which it might produce. He continued, during the remainder of the evening, watching Madame du Marset, Madame de Tesin, and M. d'Orsan. In his manner of examining their motions, he excited, at once, attentive observation, and apparent indifference. M. d'Orsan, who had placed himself near our party, offered to join us, and accordingly took his station in that part of the room. Leonce came twice to the table; M. d'Orsan did not speak to him, and when the game was ended he went away. Leonce soon after followed him.

I remained, because I saw well enough that the friends of Madame du Marset were preparing to let loose their scandal against you. Madame de Tesin began by declaring that M. d'Orsan ought to fight M. de Mondeville for insulting his aunt. With a good deal of warmth I took up the conversation, and remarked that, "in my opinion nothing was more unsuitable to the female character, than for a woman to encourage men to fight duels;" there is also added I, "a certain degree of cruelty, of caprice, and want of dignity, in this desire of giving birth to danger, in which one takes no share, in this wish, springing only from pride, of being the cause of a disastrous event." "That is true," exclaimed an old officer present, whose bravery was beyond the reach of the slightest suspicion, and who hitherto had not been observed, because he had been asleep behind Madame du Marset's chair. He awoke just as I began to speak, and repeating the expression "that is true," he added, "if a woman obliged me to fight, I should do it; but next day I should endeavour to effect a reconciliation with my opponent, and should break off all connexion with her."

Madame de Tesin did not insist on her opinion, and you may be assured there is no longer any question about a duel, the necessity of which existed only in her own brain. She next began to blame you generally, but in a manner the most perfidious. I combated whatever she said; at length several other ladies joined, and my old officer, who had never seen you but once, incessantly repeated the warmest eulogiums on your charms.

I have had occasion to remark what a degree of ill-humour prevails on every thing connected with politics. Your connexion with M. de Lebensel, creates to you more enemies than your love for Leonce, and it is in consequence of your presumed opinions, that your sentiments are scrutinized with the utmost severity. I know well enough that nothing can prevail on you to give up one of your friends; but avoid, at least, every thing which can particularly excite observation.

do not perform good offices where they are of such a nature as to be particularly remarkable. At a time when party spirit rages with great violence, a young woman who is the subject of pretty general conversation, is in danger of being exposed to considerable uneasiness, even though the conversation is generally to her advantage. Besides there is nothing existing which is equally good in the eyes of all mankind. When a generous action, if I may use the expression, is forced on you by your situation; when it is a father, a brother, or a husband, whom you have relieved, your conduct will be generally approved. But if the benevolence of your nature draws you beyond your natural circle, the person who is served is gratified for a moment; but every one else indulges permanent feelings of jealousy and ill-will, which sooner or later give rise to expressions which may poison the good offices which you have done.

In a word, Leonce is too little master of his passions to listen to any censure passed on your conduct. It is not thus that the cause of friendship is to be best supported. Come to see me to-morrow, I beseech you. I will shut my door against every one else, and we will converse without interruption. It is still time to remedy the ill which may be said of you, but it is absolutely necessary that you should return to the world. The solitary life you lead with Leonce will destroy you. The world is as busy with your character as if you were in the midst of society, and you cannot resist their censures any more than if you lived two hundred leagues from Paris. My dear Delphine, suffer yourself then to be guided by your aged friend. All the knowledge of life is compressed in an old proverb, which gossiping women are constantly repeating; if youth "*had knowledge, and age power.*" A great mystery is contained in these few words. You are yourself a proof of it; you are superior to every other person that I know; but your youth prevents your understanding, from governing either your imagination or your conduct. I am anxious to spare you the lessons of experience which are at all times the lessons of sorrow. Adieu my young friend, till to-morrow.

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## LETTER LV.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 6.

AFTER receiving the enclosed letter of Mad. d'Artenas, my dear Louisa, I expected the arrival of Leonce, with the greatest emotion. I could not recover from the alarm which the



recital of what had passed at Mad. du Marset's had excited. I was affected by the lively interest which Leonce had displayed in my defence, but I felt an indescribable emotion of pain, when I reflected on the importance he had given to my contemptible enemies; and that at the very time he was repelling their attacks, he perhaps had contracted something of an impression unfavourable to my character. These ideas were effaced, the moment he entered my chamber. He was delighted at once more seeing me, after an absence of fifteen days. He at first complimented me, with expressions full of enthusiasm on my figure, which he said was embellished with new charms. I felt immediately reassured. When I spoke to him of the evening of the day before, I saw that he was unhappy; but this unhappiness sprung from motives of generosity to me. "Mad. d'Arteus has informed you of all," said he; "do not think that I injured you, in the opinion of the world, by speaking too warmly of you." "She hopes," replied I, that an imprudence which it would be pleasing to me to pardon, might be repaired, if you had exposed no one but me. "Alas!" replied he, "for a considerable time I have been always in the wrong. My heart is in continual agitation. It is necessary, in your presence, to struggle against the love which consumes me; and I abandon myself, when I am absent from you, to culpable violence of expression. In every thing I do there is nothing which has the appearance of reason, but my continual desire to meet with some circumstance which may deliver me from life." He pronounced these words with an accent so melancholy, that I instantly saw, a cruel scene threatened me. I endeavoured to ward it off by turning the conversation to M. de Lebensei, who had been to see him that morning, to thank him for his conduct at Mad. du Marset's house. These thanks were repeated the same evening. "M. de Lebensei," twice repeated Leonce, as if that name created his uneasiness. "I have seen him twice, and he is doubtless, a man of a distinguished character; but I know not by what accident it is, that every thing he said to me, only adds to my sufferings." I asked Leonce the nature of the conversation with M. de Lebensei, but he only related to me half of what passed. It only appeared to me that it was the object of M. de Lebensei to convince him, that opinion ought to be despised when it is unjust. After supporting this position by all the arguments which could be employed by a superior mind, he finished with these remarkable words, which Leonce faithfully repeated to me. "I was for a moment flattered," said he to Leonce, "that the felicity of which you have been deprived, might have been restored. I believed that the constituent assembly of France would establish divorce, and I thought with pleasure that you would profit by it, by putting an end to a union formed by falsehood, and by uniting your lot to the best and most amiable of women. But

this project is for awhile laid aside, and with it has vanished my hope, at least for some time." I wished to interrupt Leonce, for the purpose of expressing to him the dislike which I should feel to such a proposition, even if it were possible: but at that moment he seized my hands with very lively emotion.—"In the name of heaven do not say a word on what I have related to you," exclaimed he, "you cannot conceive what the effect of a single word on this subject would be.—Suffer me to go."

He then descended to the terrace, and walked with precipitation along the walk which borders on my rivulet. I followed him slowly: returning a few steps, he saw me, and fell on his knees before me.—"No," exclaimed he, "I ought not to have quitted you, but to see you again inspires me with too powerful an emotion. Your celestial figure appears to me to have assumed new charms, which inspire me at once with the most ardent love, and with the deepest affliction. What has passed within the last fifteen days? What passed yesterday? What has M. de Lebensei said to me? What were my sensations in listening to his discourse? Ah, Delphine," said he, resting on my hand, and trembling as he endeavoured to raise himself up; "I wish to die. Come, conduct me to the bank where I may behold the last rays of the sun, where I may gaze on them with you." And he pressed my heart with a transport so affecting, that even angels might have shared it. "Continue then, my dear Delphine," said he, "it is only while you remain there, that I cease to suffer. Ah tell me, what shall become of our love, of the fatality which separates us, of my character. For in the midst of the most violent passion, perhaps it will still pursue me. What will become of us? I might have possessed you; you were not unwilling to become my wife. I might still be happy if your inflexible heart—But no, that is not the lot to which I am destined to. I shall behold you calumniated for the sentiment which unites us, and that sentiment imperfect in your soul, will consign me to torments, which know no alleviation and no end. Who will afford me consolation? Has not M. de Lebensei rendered me a thousand times more unhappy? I know not well what I feel; I am oppressed. If I could but enjoy more open air, I should suffer less," and he turned round his head to the side from which the wind proceeded, as if he wished to invite the freshness of the breeze, to calm the ardor of those burning reflections which consumed him.

I took hold of his hand; I sat down beside him, and for some moments he appeared to me more tranquil. It was the first fine evening of the spring that I had seen Leonce and I experienced the liveliest pleasure. In youth there are moments when, without any new ground of hope, and even in the midst of an accumulation of sufferings, on a sudden, agreeable sentiments are experienced, which have no other origin but a

gentle and lively feeling of existence. "Oh, Leonce," said I, "neither that Heaven, nor that nature which surrounds us, nor even my tenderness, can contribute to your happiness." "Nothing," replied he, "nothing can weaken the passion which I feel for you, and this passion, at present, is to me only the source of constant misery. Your eyes which are raised to heaven, as if to your native abode; your eyes seem to supplicate Heaven to give you strength to resist me. Delphine, in those stars which you contemplate, in those worlds, perhaps, peopled with intelligent beings, if there are any beings who love, they are united in the bonds of indissoluble affection. Neither mankind, society, nor their virtues separate them." "Cruel, that you are," exclaimed I, "and am I not given to you? Have I a feeling of which you are not the object? Does my heart beat at the sound of any other name, but yours?" "Go," replied Leonce, "since your love is weaker than duty, or what you believe to be your duty, what is that love? Can it equal or satisfy mine;" and he threw me away from him, but with trembling hands, and his eyes bathed in tears. "Delphine," added he, "your presence—your looks—all that delirium—all those charms, which awaken so many regrets, overpower me. Adieu!" and getting up precipitately, he wished to depart.

"What," said I, detaining him, "do you wish then to leave me? Is it thus that you employ the hours that are left to us? the hours of a life of such short duration to all mankind—alas! perhaps much more limited to us"—"Yes, you are in the right," said he, returning, "I was infatuated to think of quitting you. I wish to remain; I wish to be happy? Why, then, am I in this distracted state? Why," continued he, putting his hand upon his heart, "why do I experience here so many sorrows? Alas! I am not made for life; I feel myself as it were suffocated in its connexions. If I knew by what means they could all be dissolved, you would be mine, I would withdraw you from every other. *M. de Lebensei, M. de Lebensei!* why did you introduce me to this man? Ideas, the most absurd, prevail on this earth—where every thing is under the empire of opinion, that triumphant and disdainful enemy. But these absurd ideas disorder the understanding, and agitate the heart. I am no longer master of myself. I can no longer regulate my destiny. If in a future world we retain the recollection of our feelings, without the cruel affliction which they create; if you believe in an existence like this—oh! my friend, let us hasten to seize it together. We must break asunder those barriers which separate us, if by life they are consecrated. Speak to me, Delphine, I have need of the sound of your voice—that voice, at once so sweet and so melodious. It calms the spirits of an unfortunate being, whose heart is torn by the conflicts betwixt his love and his destiny. Come, do not withdraw from me." As he finished these words, he

leaned, for support, on a tree, and throwing his arms round me, held me, with a degree of force, which almost alarmed me.

"Do you not feel," said he, "the necessity of blending the feelings of our souls? As long as we continue separate, will you not experience misery? If my arms should quit their hold, would you not experience some grief which would give you a faint idea of what sufferings I endure."

I felt the liveliest motion; I trembled and I made an effort to withdraw from his hold—"You grow pale," said he; "I know not what feelings now occupy your soul; do they correspond with mine? Delphine," exclaimed he, in an accent of despair; "must I live, or is it necessary for me to die?" I was seized with the deepest terror. I wished to withdraw, but the looks, the words of Leonce, made me afraid of leaving him to himself. At no time have I been able to resist the influence of his sorrow, and at this moment I disregarded the danger, to which his culpable passion exposed me. On a sudden, retracing in my mind what had begun all the misery of this day, I know not what idea inspired me with the resolution of employing means, cruel indeed, but sure, in their operation, of filling him with shame for his weakness.

"Leonce," said I to him, in a manner which could not fail to command his attention, "what you wish would plunge me in infamy; your pure and innocent enjoyments no longer delight you. You accuse me of not loving you, when my heart is a thousand times more devoted to the tenderest affection than yours. Answer me, solemnly: reflect, that it is in the name of heaven and of love, that I ask you. If it were necessary for our union, that, like M. and Madame de Lebensei, you should brave public opinion, what would be your conduct?" Leonce sighed: drew himself back, and was silent for a moment. I availed myself of this moment, and said to him, "You have answered me, and yet you ask of me to degrade myself in my own esteem." "Cruel, that you are," interrupted Leonce, with an expression of fury, of which no language can convey an adequate idea; "no I have not answered; this is a snare which you wished to lay for me. You join stratagem to cruelty, and imitating the conduct of tyrants, you put insidious questions to the victims they have devoted to destruction." This reproach pierced my heart, and I was grieved at the idea of having merited it. "Leonce," said I to him, with tenderness, "it is not your silence nor your answer, which would make any change in my resolution or your destiny, I do not wish to find in your character, grounds of resistance. Ah! under whatever forms, in which your amiable qualities, or even your faith shall appear. Can I discover any thing in them but new seductions; but ought I not to remind you, to what yoke necessity has equally subjected both of us? this necessity is duty, it is virtue, it is all that is most sacred in

this world. Leonce, listen to me, God hears my words, if again you suffer me a second time to submit to any propositions unworthy of my character, either shall I cease to live, or shall no more behold you for ever."

"I know not," replied Leonce, then deeply dejected, "I know not what is your design; I know not with what resolution the remembrance of this day will inspire you; but if you leave me, I swear, and there is no necessity for my calling heaven to witness the sincerity of my words, I swear not to survive you; if you remain, perhaps it may be possible for me to render you happy. You shall suffer with me, or I alone shall die. Reflect on the alternative—adieu." And without adding another word, he darted to the park gate. I did not venture to obstruct his departure. I only advanced a few steps to prolong the pleasure of beholding him. He departed—for a considerable time I heard the sound of his horse's feet. At length the sounds were no longer heard. All around me was silent, and I was left in all the gloom of solitude.

I experienced reflections of the bitterest and most afflicting nature. I conjure you, my sister, do not add to their poignancy. If destiny, if Leonce, condemn me to a sacrifice the most disastrous, do not, I beseech you, hasten the fatal moment, do not precipitately cut short the thread of life. Let me be at least allowed a short interval to prepare for the horrors of dissolving nature. I am compelled to disclose to you what I had the greatest anxiety to conceal. You know as well as I do all that imposes on me the obligation of separating from Leonce. I have not wished to repel that support which you can give to my courage; but if Leonce would save me the cruel effort, if he would consent to renew those months of tranquil enjoyment, which have passed over our heads—Ah! do not tell me, that I ought no longer to indulge this solacing prospect, this remedy for all the sufferings I endure.

P. S. Madame d'Ervin's is expected in a few days. She also will, doubtless, unite her influence with yours: what will you both obtain from my distracted heart?

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## LETTER LVI.

M. DE VALERVE TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, May 15th, 1791.

I AM at Paris, madam, and not having found you there, I propose going to your country seat. I know not if you are pleased at my arrival. I shall not be much disappointed in hearing, by a few lines from your sister-in-law, that you are

not much elated at the idea of seeing me again. It seems to me, however, that I have some claims to your good will; perhaps it is your modesty which prevents you from acknowledging these claims. But I do justice to others and myself; it is impossible, however, not to feel a certain degree of happiness, when the calls of gratitude are not forgotten.

You know with what sincerity, with what ardour I have been attached to you ever since I became acquainted with you. I do not expect that all these things should be trumpeted forth at Paris, and I shall appear to considerable disadvantage in the company of all that attractive society which surrounds you; but at thirty years of age, one has had time to learn that triumphs are of little importance; and I should console myself for the total want of them, had your kindness for me remained unchanged. I feel myself melancholy and languid. You alone can relieve me from this situation. You are the only person I know for whom life is worthy of being preserved; every thing else that I meet with is so insignificant and absurd! I have spent but one day in this place, and I have already spoken with many unpolished, unthinking, frivolous people, whose attention is never seriously occupied, but in their own persons. But such is their nature, and it is I who am wrong in being put out of patience by them.

I have come in quest of you only, and on your account alone do I remain. Be not, however, alarmed, I shall not see you every day. I have a journey to make to see an aunt of mine; this visit will last a month, and several other affairs will occupy part of my time. You see that I am anxious to quiet your mind.

Yet, while I express myself in this manner, I am a prey to suffering, and you may well believe that I am. Those who doom themselves to wear the appearance of tranquillity, are but the more deeply agitated in the recesses of the heart. Accept, madam, my most respectful compliments.

A. DE VALORBE.

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## LETTER LVII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 18.

I HAVE never passed even single day of my life, without pain; my duty, it should seem, meets me under every possible form. Heaven admonishes me by the pains which I feel, that it is full time to renounce the dangerous hope of passing in retirement with Leonce, a life of happiness and pleasure. He

is no longer satisfied with the pleasure of our conversations. In vain he endeavours to conceal the agitation to which he is a prey; every thing tends to betray him. Now he loads me with the most unjust reproaches; then he plunges into a state of despair, from which I have no longer the power to relieve him. What weakness, still to remain, when his happiness no longer centres in me!

M. de Valorbe arrived yesterday at Bellerive, according to the notice which he had given in the letter that I received from him. I had not an opportunity of preparing Leonce for his arrival. It was near seven, and I dreaded what might be the feelings of my friend, on seeing a stranger with me at the very hour of the day when I was in the habit of admitting his visits only. I had not previously apprized him of the gratitude I owed M. de Valorbe, so as to be under the necessity of neither concealing from him nor informing him of his sentiments towards me. M. de Valorbe's visit, therefore, gave me considerable uneasiness: I hoped, however, that Leonce would not be so unjust as to be displeased at it. M. de Valorbe, at first, felt a good deal of embarrassment on seeing me; but he endeavoured to conceal it. You know that he is a man who is always struggling against his own disposition. He wishes to pass for one who has an absolute command of himself, though one of the most impetuous characters in existence. He never utters two sentences in succession without expressing, in some measure, his contempt for the opinion of others, while, at the bottom of his heart, he is extremely hurt at not having acquired that reputation in the world to which he thinks he is entitled. He is out of humour with men and life; and this disposition he would honour with the appellation of melancholy and philosophical indifference.

In hearing him repeat to me that there was nothing worthy of exciting a lively interest, myself always excepted; and that, among all the men he had ever known, he had not met with two deserving of his esteem; I reflected upon the prodigious difference between his character and that of Leonce.—Both of them susceptible; but the one from self-love, the other from elevation of soul—both feelingly alive to the opinion formed of them by the world; but the one from a desire of praise, the other from the fear of blame; the one to gratify his vanity, the other to preserve his honour from the slightest taint—both vehement; Leonce in his affections, M. de Valorbe in his enmities; and the latter, though good-hearted in the main, capable of every excess, the moment his pride, the habitual torment of his life, is roused into irritation. Being alone with me, he gradually recovered from that painful timidity which is the real cause of his peevishness, and was talking to me with a mixture of point and malignity, of the different persons with whom he was acquainted, at the moment Leonce

entered. Leonce's whole attention was fixed on M. de Valorbe, whose figure is somewhat striking, though his hair combed over his forehead, and a too florid countenance, gave it rather a harsh expression; and the more his appearance is examined, the more difficult it is to discover that elegance, which it is, at first view, thought to possess.

To meet a young man at my house, in intimate conversation with me, was more than was necessary to offend Leonce. His feelings were instantaneously depicted on his physiognomy, in a manner which made me shudder. M. de Valorbe continued the conversation for a few moments longer; but, when he perceived that Leonce affected to pay no attention to him, he stopped and regarded him with a fixed look. Leonce returned this look, but with what an air! he stood, leaning with his arm upon the chimney-piece, and, as he looked down upon M. de Valorbe, who was sitting beside me, he resembled the Apollo Belvidere, discharging his arrow at the serpent. M. de Valorbe retorted by a malignant smile, to that expression which he could not equal, and would certainly have proceeded to an explanation, had I not instantly said to him, that my cousin M. de Mondeville had come to consult me upon an affair of importance. M. de Valorbe reflected for a moment, and doubtless recollecting that Matilda de Vernon, my cousin, had been married to M. de Mondeville, his features were completely tranquillized.

He took leave of me; and saluted Leonce, who continued to lean, as before, against the chimney, without indicating even by his eyes, or any motion of his head, that he took the least notice of the salutation. M. de Valorbe, surprised at this conduct, was proceeding to repeat his bow, in order to extort some mark of civility, or an explanation. But prevented this intention by taking him by the hand, in order to show him into an adjoining apartment, as if I had a few words to say to him. This amicable familiarity on my part was so new to M. de Valorbe, that it made him forget every thing that happened. He followed me with considerable emotion; and I succeeded in preventing any observations on his part, by telling him, that my cousin's attention was totally absorbed by a subject of very serious anxiety, respecting which he had come to consult me. I consented to see M. de Valorbe the next morning, previous to the month's absence which he intended; and I twice permitted him to take my hand, though within sight of Leonce. I was so anxious to send away M. de Valorbe, that I paid no attention to the impression which my conduct might make upon M. de Mondeville. At last M. de Valorbe took his leave, and I returned to the apartment where I had left Leonce. No, Louisa, it is impossible for you to form any idea of the haughtiness and disdain of his first expressions. I supported them, for the



purpose of more speedily justifying myself, by stating to him, with the most scrupulous veracity, all my connexions with M. de Valorbe; and I concluded with particularly insisting on the gratitude I owed him for having saved the life of my benefactor, M. d'Albemar.

"He may," replied Leonce, "have saved the life of M. d'Albemar; but I owe him no obligation; and it will be seen whether I cannot make him renounce the claim which he imagines he has on you, and which you countenance." I was hurt by this answer, and the recollection of what had happened since Leonce's return adding to this impression, I warmly said to him: "You flatter yourself with preserving an absolute power over my life, though all my days are spent in repelling the most unworthy complaints."

"It is true," replied he warmly, "I made you the spectator of my sufferings, pardon me for having dared to do so; but do you believe, that this offence gives you a right to betray me? Do you believe yourself free, because I am unhappy? You mistake yourself much, if you suppose your new lover will become your husband, before he is taught what blood ought to be shed to obtain you!" These words roused my indignation, and prompted that reply which was best calculated to appease Leonce. "I would advise you," said I, "to give yourself up to those suspicions, which have already separated us, when we might have been united: they are more just this second time, than they were the first, for I deserved to lose your esteem on that day, when yielding to your prayers, I gave up my plan of retirement, and returned to this spot, to devote myself to the criminal and unfortunate love, I feel for you." This reply made Leonce lose all recollection of M. de Valorbe. He ceased to be irritated, but I have no longer any hope of farther happiness.

He no longer concealed from me what I had but too well conjectured. He confessed that he could not support life, while our situation remained the same; that he was jealous, because he felt that he had no right over me. He repeated this odious reproach in a tone of despair. "I know," said he, "I may be a thousand times more wretched than I am at present; there are so many degrees in grief, that its last term is unknown; so long as you do not abandon me, I shall live, but it will be a life of torture and madness." I was about to interrupt him, for the purpose of soothing his mind, by recalling it to milder sentiments, when a servant informed me, that a messenger had arrived from Madame d'Ervin, and preceded her only a few minutes.

Leonce desired to leave me, "I am not in a state," said he, "to see Madame d'Ervin. She is to be pitied, I know; but still I require preparation, before I can appear in her presence. It was she—I do not accuse her, but it was she——"

Without finishing the sentence, he pressed my hand, and departed precipitately. Madame d'Ervin's arrived a few minutes after he was gone.

Alas! what a change! she still retains almost all her charms, but her countenance is pale, and there is an expression of sadness in her countenance, which renders it impossible to look on her without a sensation of sorrow. She was so fatigued, that I could not converse with her this evening. While she reposes, my dear Louisa, I write to you. I shall also communicate my situation to Theresa. I place some hope in her counsels and example. Assist me my dear sister with your advice.

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## LETTER LVIII.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellesive, May 21.

OH! what emotions has Theresa made me experience! I know what is required of me, I know not what may be obtained. My heart sinks at the thought of the effort, she would have me make; a letter which has arrived from you, supports her exhortations. Ah! do not unite, to overwhelm me with grief. You know not what you ask of me! must I renounce Leonce? Would you have me make that sacrifice? Ah! do not pronounce it. I had a presentiment that you wished to prepare me for this horrible idea in your letter: I trembled to read it, and when I found that your delicacy had induced you to leave unfinished what you had commenced, I was comforted, as if you had relieved me from my duties, by not mentioning them. I am weak, I feel it, I am weak, and I am conscious of my weakness. I do not possess the virtues which prepare us for making great sacrifices. My soul, given up in infancy to the natural emotions, which had at all times directed its will, is not armed with powers indifferent for the accomplishment of duties so afflicting. I have not learned the power of controlling my feelings and desires. Alas! I never expected, that I should stand in need of its aid. Why do I not possess the religious elevation of Theresa? But when I supplicate Heaven, when my reason and my heart, plead with a Being of sovereign goodness, it seems to me as if he did not condemn what I approve. Nothing within me, gives me the least intimation, that to love is a crime; and the more I reflect, the more I employ myself in prayer, the more is my soul penetrated with love for Leonce.

I have written to you, that M. de Serbellane had left Italy with the view of settling in Germany, and that, despairing of

being able to induce Theresa to alter the determination which she had formed, he had secluded himself from society, and was plunged in the deepest melancholy. Theresa never pronounced his name. A letter from London apprized me of these sad details, and I have not ventured to communicate them to her. How noble and feeling is that Theresa who sacrifices all to duty. I am to conduct her the day after to-morrow to the convent. Why have I not strength of mind to follow her in her retreat? It is then necessary that we must separate. It is less cruel to descend into this religious grave of all worldly considerations, than still to live without seeing the object of our love.

The day after the arrival of Theresa, I passed the morning with her. I discovered from her conversation, that she believed herself guilty of injuries to me, and that she felt the bitterest regrets. She was afraid, however, to speak on this topic, and dreaded the moment of explanation. Leonce saw her in the evening. The moment that Madame d'Ervin's entered my chamber, he endeavoured to stifle the emotion which he experienced; but it did not escape the observation of Theresa. Addressing herself to Leonce, I then learned, that she knew all that I believed had been concealed from her.

"Sir," said she, with a tone of dignity which I had never before remarked in her timid and almost submissive character, "I know that by the most disastrous assemblage of circumstances, I have been the cause of the fatal error which has separated you from Madame d'Albemar. I have sacrificed to God all my happiness in this world; he has not yet bestowed on me sufficient force to console me for the sufferings I have occasioned my generous friend. If I had not believed in consequence of my consent that you were informed of my crime at the time of M. d'Ervin's death, I would have hastened to accuse myself before you, but I did not discover till after your marriage, the fatal mistake which the delicacy of Madame d'Albemar had induced me to conceal. I would, from the moment I suspected this during my stay here, and when I was informed of the real state of the case at Bourdeaux, from certain questions you put to my daughter—I would have disclosed the whole truth; but you were married, and I could not restore that happiness to my friend which I had destroyed. I had, besides, strong reasons for suspecting that my husband's family would take away my daughter, and would, if I had avowed myself criminal, expose me to the scandal of a public trial. I have despaired, therefore, of your pardoning me for delaying that justification which I owed to Madame d'Albemar, from the day in which I made her sign, in a manner which all the friends of M. d'Ervin's cannot destroy, those engagements which secure to Isore her fortune, and authorize me to put her under Madame d'Albemar's protection. I have relinquished all my personal claims on the property of my unhappy

husband; and the day after to-morrow I shut myself up in a convent: I am, therefore, now free to repair, in the eyes of the world, the injury I have done to the reputation of Madame d'Albemar. But, alas! I feel but too strongly that I have not the less ruined her happiness for ever. Her heart, inexhaustible in every noble and tender feeling, has not ceased to love me. Will you, sir," added she, stretching out her trembling hand to Leonce, with angelic sweetness, "will you be more inflexible than a God of goodness, who notwithstanding my crime has received my repentance? Will you pardon me?"

Oh! my sister, why have you not the power of beholding Leonce at this moment!—No; you never more would have asked me to part from him: that sad, melancholy, and stifled expression, which for some time past, he has almost always exhibited, disappeared, and his countenance was lighted up, if I may use the expression, with a sentiment the gentlest and the most pure. He bent down on one of his knees to receive the hand of Madame d'Ervin, and in a tone of voice, discovering the strongest emotion, he said to her, "can you doubt receiving the pardon which you deign to request? It is not you, it is I alone who am culpable, and still I live; still she suffers my-complaints and bears with my faults; nay, sometimes even my reproaches. Have I then the right to reproach you? No, doubtless, and still less have I the power. Your destiny, your courage, your virtue, yes, your virtue, (hear these praises without endeavouring to reject them) penetrate my heart with respect and pity, and if I were worthy of joining in your affecting prayers, I would supplicate Heaven in your behalf, for that repose which my heart no longer enjoys, but which at the expense of so many sacrifices you have at length the prospect of enjoying."

"Ah!" said Theresa, raising Leonce up, "I thank you for having banished from my breast the dread of your hatred. But this is not sufficient, you must listen to me on a subject intimately connected with your mutual happiness. But before I speak to you, I wish to see Madame d'Artenas, she is a relation of M. d'Ervin; she is besides the friend of Madame d'Albemar. It is my duty to inform her of the resolution which I have formed. Will you have the goodness, M. de Mondeville, to conduct me to her house to-morrow? The day after to-morrow I enter the convent, and a week after, which will be the first of June, I shall begin my noviciate." "Just Heaven," exclaimed I.—"It is a secret," replied Theresa: "you know that by the new laws, vows are no longer recognised, but the venerable prior who conducts me, has arranged every thing, and if the nuns are no longer to be permitted to live in France, as a community, he assures me of an asylum in a convent in Spain. I will ask of you, my dear Delphine, to conduct me to my retreat,

with my daughter. I will embrace her on the threshold of the convent for the last time; it is you who will henceforth be her mother." While speaking of her daughter, her voice altered, but making a new effort, she said to Leonce, "tomorrow, at mid-day, you will come, M. de Mondeville, to accompany me to Madame d'Artenas's house." Leonce signified his assent by a nod of his head. He was too much overcome by his feelings to be able to speak. His soul is no less tender than it is elevated. It is not love alone that renders him feeling; nature has given him every virtue. Theresa regarded him with tenderness, and it is of him, I am sure, that she would have implored protection, if there had remained for her any interests in this world.

Next day, Leonce and Madame d'Ervin's returned together from Madame d'Artenas's about four o'clock. I saw, without knowing the cause, that Leonce had been extremely affected. Theresa, apparently calm, asked leave to retire for a few hours to her chamber. Leonce remained alone with me, and informed me of all that had passed. He had no idea of the purpose of Madame d'Ervin's in taking him to Madame d'Artenas's house, and on the way she did not utter a single word which could give him the least idea of it. They arrived together at Madame d'Artenas's house, and they found her with her niece Madame de R. After Madame d'Ervin's had announced to Madame d'Artenas the resolution which she had taken, she described to her the conduct I had observed to her, and attributed to it a degree of merit far beyond what it deserved. She then disclosed all except what related to my attachment to Leonce. He told me, that through his whole life he had never entertained such high respect for any woman as for Madame d'Ervin's, at the moment she believed that she was performing a humiliating duty. Leonce remarked, that Theresa coloured several times while she was speaking, but without ever hesitating a moment—and I discovered united in her, added he, the greatest conflict of timidity and modesty, combined with the firmest resolution. She finished by declaring to Madame d'Artenas, that far from wishing what she had said to be kept secret, she was anxious that it should be made public every time that her connexions in life gave her an opportunity of repelling that calumny which might be directed against me.

She reflected a moment, after finishing these painful confessions, as if for the purpose of discovering whether some other duties were not still to be performed. No one attempted to break silence. What had passed had too sensibly affected all who were present, to permit them to make any answer to her; and as if she were afraid that the conversation would revert to this subject, she rose for the purpose of preventing this, and with a gentle inclination of her head to Madame

d'Artenas and her neice, she withdrew, without giving them time to express the interest and pity which her confession had inspired. You may conceive my dear Louisa, that I was powerfully affected with this scene. Admirable Theresa! more admirable than if she had never been guilty of a crime. What virtues have sprung from her remorse? How much more respectable is her conduct than mine, who suffer myself, without support, to approach the farthest limits of morality, still endeavouring to persuade myself that I have not passed them.

This day, so full of interest, and which had excited such powerful emotions, was not yet ended: Theresa had not fulfilled all that religion commanded her to perform. She rejoined Leonce and me, and as I was approaching her to express my grateful sense of her conduct: "attend," said she, "to me, for I am much afraid that I shall be forced to give you pain, but to-morrow I quit the world, and to-day it is my duty to perform all that is expected from those who would take leave of life for ever. Listen to me," she then sat down, and addressed herself to Leonce and me, in the following terms: "I have destroyed your happiness; had it not been for me, you would have been united, and virtue as well as love would have contributed to your enjoyments. This fatal disappointment, this disappointment, for which I never can make atonement, was occasioned by my crime. A disaster still more dreadful, the death of my husband, was the immediate consequence of my criminal love. It is not I, then, it is not I who ought to assume the right of offering severe counsels to souls so pure as yours. Still, however, God sometimes employs the wicked to give the most salutary lessons to the most virtuous. You are attached to each other by the most endearing of all sentiments—by love! one of you is bound by the most sacred ties, and yet you see each other daily; you pass your lives together, trusting to that morality, which, at present, supports you. Doubtless, I do not possess an understanding so enlightened as yours. I cannot lay claim to your virtues, but, nevertheless, I formed the same resolution as you, but the presence of him whom I adored, gradually weakened every virtuous sentiment which afforded me support. Can I, after my fall, involve you in the same fate? shall I have to render an account of your soul to the Supreme Judge of all? Alas! I alone would deserve punishment, but you would no longer be that incomparable being whom I hope one day to meet again in heaven, if my repentance shall fit me for a place in those blessed abodes which are prepared for the just. And will you, Leonce," continued she, "will you be happy if you destroy my friend? if you lead astray that noble and virtuous spirit, which God will more peculiarly call to himself, when misfortune, or what amounts to the same thing, a long life, will make her

feel the necessity of the aid of a positive religion; when she will guide my daughter in her conduct through life, when she herself ceases to command universal admiration." "Your daughter," exclaimed I, "why will you abandon her? why will you commit her to my care? I am unworthy of so important a trust."

"Delphine! generous Delphine!" interrupted Theresa, "have I made myself so ill understood, as that you even for a moment, imagine that in nature, there exists a being, for whom I entertain greater respect, than for you! though you subject yourself to the empire of love, I know that your heart continues pure, and that even in the commission of faults, it would only feel more cruelly; but more certainly the necessity of morality. The sorrows of my friend, would only be to me, an additional security, for the pains she would bestow on the virtuous education of my daughter. But you, Delphine—what would become of you, if once only, you yielded to the power of love, and by what vain hope do you flatter yourself, that you can avoid it? If he tells you of the affliction which your resistance creates, if he discover all the extent of his sorrows; if he conceal from you his sufferings, and they are discovered to you only by his altered looks, what will you do to afford him consolation? Listen to my words—I am about to bury myself in retirement for ever; the hand of God is already upon me. I have found in my soul strength sufficient to break asunder every tie, to renounce every enjoyment. I could not have felt power sufficient to behold the sufferings of him whom I love; and do you think yourself possessed of such strength? Delphine, infatuated that you are, you must either separate yourself from him for ever, or submissively yield to his desires. You cannot find but in the exaltation of a great sacrifice, force sufficient to resist the power of love. Delphine, in the name of Heaven"—"Stop!" exclaimed Leonce, in the most plaintive tone, "it is not to Delphine that you ought to address yourself. She is free, and I am bound in indissoluble chains. She wished to unite her destiny to mine, and I despised the rich offering she presented to me. If any heart is to be torn with anguish, let that heart be mine. I have strength sufficient to depart—I am confident I have strength. The flames of war will ere long be kindled in France. I will go and join myself with that party whose opinions are congenial to my own. Among that party, destitute of power, death will be found without difficulty. If in your religion you have resources sufficient to enable Delphine to support the death of Leonce; if you have such resources, I embrace it, and I pardon you for indulging its consolations. But can you imagine that after having passed with her days full of agitation, but at the same time of delight; after spending with her days, during which I have confided to her my most secret sorrows and

my inmost feelings, that I could survive the sudden deprivation of my mistress and my friend! Of her who should have been my wife, and whom I should see no more; of her who directs my actions, gives an impulse to my thoughts, and who is ever present before me. Believe me, without having recourse to a resolution dictated by despair, my blood ceasing to flow, would no longer animate my life: and is it you, madam, is it you, that can forget what you yourself have inspired? have you forgotten all that he, perhaps, even now suffers, who is far separated from you?" "It is too much!" exclaimed Theresa, turning pale, and discovering a convulsive trembling, which alarmed me exceedingly. "It is too much! What language is this that you make me hear? Do you think that my passions are so completely overcome that I am prepared for death? Do you know what the sacrifice I am about to make has cost me? Can you thus awaken all my bitterest recollections? Cease, cease! Delphine, support me; bear me hence."

Leonce, inconsolable at the situation into which he had thrown Madame d'Ervin, did not dare to approach her. She was carried into my chamber. I followed her, and I sent word to Leonce, that I should not return to the apartment where I had left him. I did not wish to quit Madame d'Ervin, and I felt myself in a state of such agitation, that I could not speak to Leonce. How could I have made him the witness of those cruel uncertainties, of that bitter remorse to which the words of Madame d'Ervin had given birth? I am anxious to come to a final resolution, but I cannot see him again till that resolution is formed. What it will be is known only to Heaven. Madame d'Ervin continued near an hour, without uttering a word, occasionally listening to me, and answering me only by her tears. I thought this was the favourable moment for attempting to divert her from her resolution of entering into a convent. The first words I spoke on that subject instantly rendered her calm, and she gently expressed a wish to depart. I have since been informed that she spent two hours in prayer, and that afterwards she retired to rest and slept with the greatest composure till morning.

For myself I passed the night without ever for a moment closing my eyes. Unfortunate that I am! An enlightened understanding, when the heart is subjected to the empire of passion, is only a source of misery. I cannot, like Theresa, blindly adopt all the articles of faith which fill her imagination, and of which my heart stands so much in need. I invoke some unknown fervour, some principle of fanaticism, some phrensy, some undefined sentiment to come to my support and assist me in struggling against love. Sometimes I am ready to conjure you to come hither. I wish to place my destiny at your disposal. You would speak to Leonce, you would see him and judge of his character. Alas! my sister, that request



would be too importunate. Could you make that sacrifice to her whom you have brought up, and who would now ask you again to resume the most absolute empire over her?

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## LETTER LIX.

DELPHINE TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, May 26, 1791.

No! Do not come: all is promised, all is, I think, decided. Theresa has perhaps carried to excess the influences which the softness of my temper gave her over me; but, in short, I have yielded to her tears, to the ardour of her entreaties. Her imagination was struck with the idea that she should have to accuse herself of the loss of my soul; and her confessor had, I believe, the preceding evening, impressed her anew with this terror. Her grief and her eloquence completely overpowered me. I did not, however, consent to remove to a distance from Leonce, until my mind was set at ease as to the probable consequences of his despair. I cannot, I ought not, to abandon him without this assurance. My real criminality would be to endanger his life; and what terror can supersede an alarm of this nature? I can more easily endure remorse itself.

Theresa wishes that Leonce should be a witness with me of the ceremony which is to consecrate the moment when she shall assume the veil of a novice. She confides in the impression to be made by that solemnity, and notwithstanding the resistance he has given to all her former entreaties, she conceives that at the foot of the altar, her last adieu may obtain Leonce's consent to my departure. She wishes to re-state to him, in that situation what carries the force of conviction to her mind, that her own salvation essentially depends upon mine, and that he cannot, without barbarity, resist the last effort which she is disposed to make, in order to rescue me from the calamities which await me. She thinks herself sure of thus obtaining the consent of Leonce. I have given her my promise, that if she actually do obtain it, I will set off that very instant. The ceremony is to take place in six days, and till then I have sworn that I will entirely conceal my feelings from Leonce. While Theresa extorted my assent to every engagement she thought fit to propose, I entertained, I must confess to you, a secret hope, that nothing would induce Leonce to acquiesce in my departure. But my opinion is now changed. Theresa is so impressive; the moment which she has fixed on is so well adapted to affect his feelings! I shall

add my own entreaties to hers: it is my duty to do so, and I will perform it. But to remain silent during these six days; to see him again with the idea that we shall soon, perhaps, be separated for ever! Theresa has exacted too much from me; her devotion, at once fervid and romantic, instead of supporting me, overpowers, and carries me along with it,

In a thousand different ways has she repeated to me, with that impassioned accent, which she derives from love, but consecrates to religion, that I could not attempt to deny her the hope which she still entertained of saving me, and thus of obtaining the forgiveness of her own transgressions. "What I request of you," said she, "it is very trifling: I only ask permission to try whether, at a moment of peculiar solemnity, I cannot melt your lover to a tender sense of the fate to which he consigns you. This request you cannot oppose without a conscious avowal, that, were he even to accede to your departure, you would not be capable of carrying it into execution!" Actuated by a secret dread, I still persisted in refusing her request; but as I was on the point of leaving her, she threw herself at my feet, together with her daughter, and so forcibly represented what I should feel if I plunged myself into guilt, what she herself had suffered, because at a distance from me, she had no friend of rigorous intellect to apply to for assistance, that she excited in my heart so powerful an emotion, that I consented to every thing she could demand.

What will be the result? An agonizing separation. I am like a person distracted, and disposed of without consulting my inclinations. I know not what I have to fear. Such efforts will, perhaps, but increase the dangers from which it is intended to save me. Ah! Leonce, it is you who will be the arbiter of my fate; it is you who will burst asunder our reciprocal ties?

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## LETTER LX.

### LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, May 28th, 1791.

WHENCE proceeds the anxiety which I feel? Never did you appear more affecting, more tender than yesterday! I was intoxicated with delight while in your company; but when I endeavoured to trace back the occurrences of the evening, I felt only an uneasiness, and melancholy which it is impossible to describe. I found you sitting for your likeness, intended as a present to me. You were habited in a Greek costume, which

rendered you still more celestial. All your charms were displayed to my view. I looked at you for some time, but felt myself a prey to a passion which consumed my life. The painter left the room: I clasped you in my arms; and twice you reclined your head upon my shoulders; but I did not impart to you the ardour which animated my own feelings. Your eyes were bathed in tears, your visage pale, and your looks dejected. In this situation, had it been possible for your heart to have yielded to my love, an indescribable, but all powerful sentiment would, in my opinion, have prevented me from accepting even the consummation of my happiness.

I retired from you, and approached you, by turns; you continued silent; yet you loved me, and my bosom was agitated by a fever of affection, and a thrilling sensation of regret, which was altogether inexplicable. I requested you to take your harp. You know what effect it has in soothing my griefs, to hear your voice accompanied with that instrument. Ah! replied you, in an animated tone, I cannot endure music; do not ask me to play.—Why could you no longer endure music? you have often repeated to me those words of Shakespeare:

The man that hath no music in himself,  
And is not moved by concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.

Why then has music lost its influence over your heart?

I have your promise that you will never depart without my knowledge. I cannot doubt it; you have repeated it anew. What then is the cause of the condition in which I beheld you? Ah! could you have felt some attack of that grief which weighs me down to the grave? Could you have felt that we must die, if we are not united together? No! your eyes expressed neither the transport, nor the uncontrolled indulgence of passion. Delphine, your soul is so pure, so open, that nothing can ruffle it unperceived by your friend. Tell me, therefore, what was the sentiment which yesterday occupied your mind?

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## LETTER LXI.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, May 31.

A FRIEND of yours, has written to you, that he thought me altered, and this circumstance has given you uneasiness. Set your mind at ease, I entreat you. I am indisposed, but my

life is not in the slightest danger. I have frequently an attack of fever in the evening; but it proceeds from mental affliction. For some time past I have been alarmed, lest Madame d'Albemar should desert me; and the anxiety occasioned by this apprehension, excites a continual agitation in my system, but be assured, that it is not this bodily disorder which will terminate my existence. Do not come to see me: you could be of no assistance to me. Never did one feel what I feel! I will remain no longer in this condition. It must be brought to a conclusion; cost what it may, it must. Await my fate in patience; I do not wish your tranquil life to approximate mine; you would be brought within the sphere of a fatal influence.

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## LETTER LXII.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

Bellerive, June 1, ten in the morning.

MADAME D'ERVINS writes to me again this morning, that she is extremely desirous that you should be a witness to the ceremony of this evening. Call on me at four o'clock to conduct me to the convent. Such is her request, and we cannot refuse it.

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## LETTER XLIII.

ANSWER OF LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, June 1, at noon.

If you insist upon it, I will go; but endeavour to get me excused. I dread affecting scenes; you know not what mischief they do me, in my present disposition of mind! I will be with you by four; but, if possible, write to Madame d'Ervin that you will go alone.

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## LETTER LXIV.

DELPHINE TO MADMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, June 2.

If I am not yet altogether unworthy of your favour, my Louisa, I know not to what aid of heaven I am indebted for it.

Did I merit this, and after so culpable a period of my life? Doubtless not: but it has been extended to me, that I may give myself up to sorrow—that I may expiate, by my grief, that day on which my feelings profaned every thing that is most respectable on earth. I am extremely ill; my life is even supposed to be in danger. I am ordered not to write; but, if I must die, I am anxious that you should know something of the last hours which I have passed. They have been terrible! let the recollection of them remain deposited in your breast! Learn what are the struggles which, perhaps, have immediately preceded the close of my life! I am apprehensive that my fever will throw me into a state of delirium; I have, perhaps, but a few moments left in which to collect my thoughts; these I still devote to you. Love me! if I die I may hope for forgiveness.

Leonce, though with reluctance, at last resolved to accompany me, in compliance with the request of Madame d'Ervin. We reached the gate of the convent to which I had conducted her the preceding evening, and near which resided her confessor. I there found a man waiting for me, who gave me a letter from her, apprising me that she was to be admitted a novice—and in what place, just heavens!—in the very church where I had witnessed the marriage of Leonce! This circumstance Theresa had concealed from me; but it was upon this choice that she relied for effecting a triumph over our love. I doubted, I must confess, whether I should go forward; but the conclusion of Theresa's letter was so urgent—she told me in such forcible language that she required to see me once more, and that I should pierce her to the heart, if I deprived her, at such a crisis, of the presence of her only friend—that I had not the courage to refuse her. Leonce, on this occasion, perceiving how much I was agitated, insisted that I should not be left alone to undergo this painful trial. I was already so much disconcerted, that I was no longer mistress of my will, and I permitted myself to be conducted, without reflection or resistance.

During the part of the way which we still had to go, both of us preserved the most profound silence. The instant, however, that my carriage turned into the road leading to the church of St. Marie, Leonce recollecting the spot, which, indeed, he could not well forget, said, with a deep sigh: "In this manner did I accompany Matilda: there she was," exclaimed he, pointing to where I sat: "Oh! why did I come! I cannot——" He seemed to wish to get away; but, as he looked at me, my ~~pain~~ and terror must have certainly struck him; for, instantly interrupting himself, he added: "No! poor, unhappy Delphine, you are suffering; I will not leave you to suffer alone; lean upon your friend." We alighted from the carriage; the church was shut against every one

except us: an aged priest came to meet us, and, having but an imperfect recollection of the two visitors who were ordered to be admitted—"Madam," said he to me, pointing towards Leonce, "this gentleman is undoubtedly your husband!" Ah! Louisa, this simple observation awakened so many topics of regret and remorse, that I stood motionless before the gate of the church, not daring to pass over the threshold. Leonce precipitately replied—"I am related to the lady;" and drew me in along with him.

The priest made us sit in a bench at a little distance from the grating of the choir. Leonce seated himself so as to avoid seeing the altar at which he had been married. His breathing was loud and short. As for me, I had covered my eyes with my handkerchief; I saw nothing, I scarcely thought of any thing; I was merely sensible of an inward agitation, a terror without any fixed object, which entirely discomposed my reflections. One of the doors communicating with the interior of the convent, was thrown open. A number of nuns, covered with black veils, and followed by the unfortunate Theresa, dressed in a white robe, advanced at a little distance from us in profound silence. Theresa supported herself on the arm of her confessor; but her pace, however, was not unsteady. On the contrary, I could remark that an extraordinary fervour of mind, had rendered it rather rapid. As she walked up the church, the priests chanted a mournful psalm, which was accompanied by an organ of considerable softness of tone. Theresa left the nuns to speak with me. She clasped my hand with an expression, which I shall never forget, and reaching a letter to Leonce, said to him in a low voice:—"When the eternal barrier shall have closed upon me, read this letter, in this very church, by the light of that lamp which burns at a few steps from the altar, where you pronounced your irrevocable oath. Listen, in order to prepare yourself for what I venture to request of you, to the hymns of the nuns, who are about to consecrate my entrance into their asylum. As soon as they have ceased, I exist no longer for this world. But, if you grant my prayers, you will effect my reconciliation with God. I shall no longer be chargeable in his sight, with the perdition of both of you; and you, my friend," said she to me, "you see to what love has brought me.—Shun my example—adieu!" In uttering these words, she approached the grating of the choir, turned round once more towards me, and as that grating was about to separate us for ever, she gave me a parting sign, as if already on the confines of earth and heaven, I figured to myself that I saw her pass from life to death, and she appeared in the distance like a light shade invested with immortality.

Leonce sat immovable with Theresa's letter in his hand. "What can it contain?" said he to me, in the most plaintive

tone—"What would you have me do? Are you in concert with her?"—"I conjure you," interrupted I, "to obey the request of Theresa. Do not yet read the contents of her letter. Bestow on her a moment of commiseration; I shall join with you, my friend. Let us for a few moments longer indulge in a sorrow, unmingled with bitterness." Leonce, who stood behind me, rested his hand on the pillar, against which I also supported myself; my head reclined on his trembling hand; and this movement, I conceive, created a momentary suspense of his agitation. The music continued, and the impression which it made, plunged me into an extraordinary reverie, of which I have retained but a very vague recollection. But I was soon roused by the stifled sighs of my unfortunate friend, and I gave unrestrained vent to my tears.

I invoked the Deity to terminate my existence in this situation, in which I experienced the most delightful sensations. I no longer imposed any restraint on my soul, which yielded to unbounded emotions. I seemed about to expire in tears, and felt as if my life was about to be extinguished by an immoderate excess of tenderness and sorrow. I know not how long this ecstasy continued, but I was only recovered from it by the noise made by the curtains of the choir when they were drawn close. The ceremony being terminated, the nuns and the priests retired: all now was silence; not a soul was seen, and Leonce and I remained alone in the church.

Without letting go my hand, Leonce approached towards the light, and read the solemn, eloquent, and terrible prayer, which Theresa had addressed to him, to induce him to save my soul, by breaking off our connexion, and seeing me no more. I could only hear some words, which he trembled as he repeated. He had scarce finished, when turning towards me his eyes full of anguish and reproach, he said: "Have you too combined in producing these terrible emotions? Have you resolved to leave me?"—"Consent," said I, with an effort, "consent to my absence, I conjure you, Leonce; yield to the voice of heaven, which Theresa has pronounced! Do you not perceive that the vigour of my soul is exhausted? I must fly or become criminal! It is not in my power to struggle longer! Let us resolve this moment!"—"It is then true," replied Leonce, "it is true that you have formed the design of leaving me! Have the days we have passed together made no impression on your heart! Well! it is done! There is not another hour of repose for me on this earth! But when must this separation take place?"—"Instantly!" I exclaimed; "every thing is prepared; allow me to depart; let this sacred spot witness so noble an effort!"—"It shall witness," said he, "my death; I am overcome; I no longer possess hope sufficient to animate me to triumph

over your design! I was deceived! you have not loved me! you can part! Well! well! the sacrifice is made! Adieu."

Never, Louisa, was the grief of Leonce so profound, and so affecting; it had changed its character; he no longer tried to detain me, but I saw in his countenance a dreadful expression of gloomy resignation, which chilled me with horror. I spoke to him, but he replied not. I could not endure the idea of his ceasing to believe in my passion for him; ten times he repulsed the assurances I made him, and seemed to resist every sentiment of kindness, as if, determined to die, he was afraid of doing any thing to regret in life. At last a more tender accent suddenly arrested his attention, but produced a state of distraction, not less alarming than the dependency from which he recovered. "If you wish," said he, "that I should believe in your love, if you wish that I should live, there still exists one means! it alone can expiate the sufferings you have made me endure! it alone can prevent the torments that await me! We must bind ourselves to each other, even this moment by an oath, which you may call sacrilege, but without which no human power can make me consent to live."—"What wouldst thou of me?" said I, alarmed; "Art thou not the sovereign of my heart?"—

—"Who can rely," he replied, in the bitterest accent of anguish; "who can rely on thy uncertain resolution, on a heart always struggling, always ready to escape from me? There is only one tie on earth, there is but one that can secure thee! This moment then of despair, is the last in which passion always repressed, always conquered by each new repentance, can demand, can obtain the pledge of love. Let it be given even in the spot, the cruel recollections of which you constantly invoke against me. Let the silent horrors of this place witness your promise, or irrevocable refusal. Come with me;"—I found that he wished to draw me towards the fatal altar, near the pillar behind which I beheld his unfortunate marriage; we were still a few steps from it, and I leaned on one of the tombs, which pious affection has erected in this church.

—"Stop here," said I to Leonce, "let us remain near the dead." "No," he replied, with a voice which I still think I hear, "resist me not: follow me."—My strength was exhausted; he put his arm around me, and carried me forward with him. I found myself exactly in front of the altar, where the sacrifice of my destiny was accomplished: I looked on Leonce to discover what passed in his mind. His hair hung loose, his beauty, more remarkable than at any other period of his life, had assumed a supernatural character, which penetrated me at once with terror and love—"Give me your hand," he cried, "give it to me. If it is true you love me, you must, unhappy Delphine, you must, as well as I, desire



happiness. Swear then on this altar, yea, on this very altar, from which we ought to drive for ever the horrible phantom of a hateful marriage; swear to know no other ties, no other duties than those of love; take an oath to belong entirely to your lover, or I shall dash my head against these steps, until my blood spring up against you. I have sustained too much sorrow; I have struggled too long. In this sanctuary then, in this house of tears, I declare to you that I am wearied of suffering: I wish to be happy, but the traces of my sorrow are too deep, nothing can calm my fears. I shall always see you ready to escape from me, if the most endearing and sacred bonds do not assure me of our union. The burden that presses on my soul is too heavy to be borne; I must either enjoy the pleasures of life, or death must snatch me from my pains. If you refuse me, Delphine, the place is well chosen: there are graves under our feet; point out the stone you design for me; make some lines be engraved upon it, and then fancy you have performed every duty towards me. Alas! what remains there of those men, who like me have been unfortunate? only some almost effaced inscriptions, to which chance sometimes directs our inattentive eyes! Delphine, death is under our footsteps; either bury thy love in these tombs, or throw thyself into his arms. He will carry thee far from the horror of these vaults, and we shall share together the enjoyments of heaven and of love."

His looks filled me with inexpressible terror; I said, "Leonce, let us leave this place, I shall not part from you, but what would you with me?" "Let us go hence," he exclaimed, detaining me with violence: "in an hour you would resume your dreadful empire over me. I shall renounce this miserable life of fears, of tortures, and of sorrows. This day shall terminate an existence which is insupportable: Your soul must, at this moment, feel what sacrifice you are capable of making for me. If it resist the state in which you see me, and the agitation that state produces in yourself, then all is over; every relation between us is broken. Take the oath I require, or leave me; but return to-morrow at the same hour, and you shall hear the priests sing for me the same hymns you have sung for your friend. Thou wilt then be alone in the world, Delphine! Alas! Delphine, when thus separated for ever, from all which was once dear to thee, wilt thou not regret the unfortunate man who so tenderly loved thee?" Louisa, my heart wavered: "what cruelty," I exclaimed, "Wouldst thou in this place ask such a promise? Wouldst thou profane all that is sacred on earth?" "I would," replied Leonce, "bind myself to you for ever—I would at once free thy soul from all the vain scruples which yet tyrannise over it. Were we, Delphine, placed at the extremity of the world—had volcanoes swallowed up the earth

which gave us birth, and all the beings we have known, wouldst thou then think it a crime to unite thyself to thy lover? Ah! then let us forget the universe: it exists no more; nothing remains but our love. Daughter of heaven! thou never hast known the enjoyments of love; no mortal has possessed thy charms. When thy soul shall entirely be given up to me, thou wilt love me with an affection which thou cannot as yet comprehend. We shall then enjoy a new and a united life, of which our separate existence can afford no idea. Say, then, dost thou not feel, as I do, a transport of the heart, pointing towards supreme felicity; a delirium of hope which cannot be disappointed without making the future prospect of life fade for ever? Hear me then, Delphine; if thou leavest this place without abandoning thy resolution, before thy designs are irrevocably changed, I know that all is finished with me. The horror of my violence will pursue thee; thou wilt recollect only this sentiment. I have done, Delphine, pronounce thy decision; death was never so near me! Were all my blood," he cried, with vehemence, striking his breast, "flowing from this heart, I should have a thousand times more chance of life than at this moment!"

Just heaven! what could give an idea of the expression of Leonce, at this time? He seemed so agitated that I dreaded some dreadful event. I had almost lost all power over myself: I was about to promise in the sanctuary of virtue, to forget all my duties. By a last effort, however, I threw myself on my knees, and addressed a prayer to heaven, which, doubtless, was heard.

"Oh God!" I exclaimed, "enlighten me with a sudden ray of wisdom! all the recollections, all the reflections of my life are no longer of use to me: unexpected emotions seem to have seized my soul, which no calculation of duty has foreseen: if so much love be an excuse in thy eyes—if when such sentiments exist, thou requirest not of human strength to resist them; suspend this horror which I still experience, for an oath I believe impious! Relieve me from the remorse of my soul, that forgetting all I have been accustomed to respect, I may place my glory, my virtue, my religion, in the happiness of him I love; but if this oath, demanded with so much fury, be a crime: Oh, my God! do not condemn me to behold Leonce in torment: annihilate me this moment, in this holy temple filled with thy presence! opposite sentiments, of equal force, alternately take possession of my soul, and thou alone canst terminate this terrible incertitude. Oh, my God! give me, I beseech thee, the peace of the heart, or the peace of the grave!—"

I know not what I experienced at this moment, but the violence of my emotions surpassed my strength. I thought I was about to die, and impressed with the idea that there was some-

thing supernatural in this effect of my prayer, while I fainted, I still articulated these words: "hear me, O my God!"

Leonce has since told me, that he was persuaded as well as myself, that Heaven had granted my prayers; and on raising me in his arms, he doubted, for some time, whether I lived. He lifted me to his carriage, and I arrived at Bellerive before I recovered my senses. When I opened my eyes, I found Leonce by my bed-side; for a long time I remembered nothing that had happened; but as the day began to appear, my recollection gradually returned, and I trembled at the retrospect. Remorse, shame, and the strongest terror seized me, on recollecting the place in which such a criminal oath had been required of me. I looked at Leonce, desired him to leave me, and return to his own house to calm the inquietude which his absence must have caused to Matilda. I saw from his agitation that he dreaded the resolution I might form; I therefore promised to wait for his return this evening. Oh! I cannot desert him; I have no longer resolution in any thing.

Indeed, Louisa, I believe my prayer has really been heard: I seem to feel the approaches of death: I have, at least, been able to write to the end of this terrible relation; and you will know what has happened to me—what a struggle I have sustained—what sorrows! — Ah! they will be the last. Adieu! Louisa, my hand trembles; I feel my reason disturbed: with my last strength, with my last accents, I would tell you I love you.

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## LETTER LXV.

MADAME DE LEBENSEI TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, June 4, 1791.

I AM extremely unhappy, madam, to be obliged to communicate to you most painful intelligence. Madame d'Albemar is at the point of death. She had been removed to Paris in a state of delirium, and every word she utters plainly shows that the sufferings of the heart have produced her disorder. There still is time; come to her. M. de Mondeville is in a state little different from that of Delphine—My husband alone preserves sufficient presence of mind to assist them. Madame d'Albemar has already several times pronounced your name. Ah! why are you not here? but it still is to be hoped that you will arrive in time,

## LETTER LXVI.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, June 10, 1791.

You have been told that I am distracted; it is true the life of Delphine is in danger.—I am in the room next to hers—I hear her groan—Wretch that I am, I have plunged her into this state. What then can give me calm? Do you imagine, that to be resolved not to exist after her, is sufficient to tranquillize me? No, while her fate is in suspense, my torments are unspeakable. Yesterday she regarded me with an air of celestial mildness. She rested her head on my breast, as if she expected to receive some benefit from me—from me, the only cause——No, she shall not die! For these some hours her complaints have been less piercing.

In her delirium, she constantly recollects a horrible scene in a church——Last night in particular, while Madame de Lebensci and I watched by her bed-side, she started suddenly up. As she raised her head, her hair fell down upon her shoulders: a deadly paleness was spread over her face, and yet possessed a charm I never observed before. Her look penetrated my heart, and the sentiment of compassion I felt was so painful, that I should have died that moment, to be relieved from it—“Leonce,” said she, “Leonce, I conjure you not to exact of me an impious oath, in this most sacred place. Do not make me promise my dishonour—do not threaten me with your death—let me depart! Give me back the promise I made to remain.—Oh! free me from that promise!

She called me, and yet she knew me not: her eyes sought me round the room, and she could not perceive me. Throwing myself on my knees before her bed, I exclaimed, that I relieved her from every promise; that she was at liberty to leave me.—What would I not have done to have consoled her! What decree would I not have pronounced against myself! But, alas! she heard not my answer. Then repeating her words over and over, she blamed me for refusing her request; and each time, thinking she received no reply, she begged my pardon in accents still more plaintive, still more distressing.

Can you imagine any tortures equal to those I then experienced? You would have thought some magic power prevented us from understanding each other; she implored and I appeared inflexible. She complained of my silence, and her delirium prevented her from hearing me. I, whom she alter-

nately accused and supplicated, was beside her, endeavouring to make her comprehend some of the words which my despair suggested; but I was not able, either to undeceive or to comfort her. Oh! my master, how have you fashioned my heart? Whence come those sorrows? I recollect, that when I was a boy, I once nearly expired in your arms—Surely you would not have succoured me, had you foreseen what was to happen. I should not have been here—those cries would not have followed me to my tomb—I should have long since reposed in peace!—Oh! she calls me.——

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## LETTER LXVII.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

June 12.

You live, my Delphine—they take God to witness that you live; Heaven reward them! How long has been the time which is passed!—Is it true, you were in danger only ten days! The recollection of all the years of my life seems shorter. They assure me that you are better, and I ought not to doubt the pleasing assertion; but I am far from being satisfied! The thoughts which agitate you, prolong your sufferings. What shall I do, what shall I say, to pour consolation into your soul? Shall I repeat, that I detest the criminal scene which has produced so terrible an effect on your imagination? Doubtless you are convinced of this. Recollect, that I refused to follow you into that fatal church—I had been for some days in a state of reverie, which deprived me of all command over myself. The solemn prayer of Theresa, which I believed she had concerted with you; the dread of your departure; the recollection of an unhappy marriage, which memory painfully retraced; the love, the regret I felt, all conspired to distract me: but can man explain the cause of his insanity? I was deprived of reason; but you need not fear that this criminal delirium will again return: you cannot suppose that possible, if you have any idea of the impression made upon my heart, by the state in which I beheld you. My love is unconquerable: it can never lose any thing of its force, but it has changed its character.

Before your indisposition, it seemed to me, that we were both animated by a kind of supernatural existence. Death was by me forgotten: my mind was wholly devoted to passion; its prodigies, its enthusiasms inflamed me. In the midst of this intoxication, trouble brought you to the brink of the tomb. Ah!

that scene can never be effaced! Fate has replaced me under her yoke; she has recalled me to her empire, and I submit. Fear as well as duty command this resignation; for have I not been at the point of losing you? Am I certain that I still possess you? Did not my criminal ecstasies fill thy innocent soul with terror and remorse?

O Delphine! being whom I adore! angel of youth and beauty! be again thyself! Let not thy spirits be depressed as if my guilty passion could humble that sublime soul which has triumphed over it!—O Delphine! having seen thee about to ascend to heaven, I consider thee as a divinity, who may receive my vows, but from whom I never must expect affections similar to my own. What passeth in thy heart, Delphine? Thou appearst indifferent to life, and yet I am near thee; we are not separated; we see each other constantly, and yet thou wouldst die! Can the days we spent at Bellerino, my love, be effaced from thy memory? They were happy days! Are they remembered no longer? Ah! shall they not return!—Wretch that I am, would I still desire thee to intrust thy destiny to me? Until I knew thee, Delphine, thy life was peaceful; thou wert admired and beloved by all who beheld thee; but since the moment we became acquainted, how great have been thy sufferings! Celestial creature, dost thou not regret to have loved me? Is that sentiment which once formed thy only consolation extinguished? Thou hast not been able to speak to me and I remain ignorant of thy thoughts—I know no longer how dear I am to thee. But since I do not feel myself alone in the world, doubtless thou lovest me still.

Fearing to agitate thee by discourse, I try to tranquillize thy mind by this letter—I write to tell thee, thou art free, yes, free to leave me! If my punishment, if my despair—No, I would not alarm thee. I give thee absolute power, and thou mayest use it, whatever the sacrifice cost me. But, my dear Delphine, when I swear by all that is sacred, to love thee as a brother, why wouldst thou change our manner of living? Dost thou not shudder at these new resolutions which convulse a state of existence, in which every thing is so happily disposed!—Wretch that I am, why have I not always thought thus? I am resigned—thou hast no longer any thing to fear from me: of this thou must be convinced, for we know ourselves too well not to be able to answer for each other.

Oh! is it not true that at this moment thou mayest recover if thou wilt: health is in thy power. Our love is sufficiently powerful either to summon or to repel death: it animates us; it is our life. Ah! Delphine! let its sacred flame still glow in thy bosom: be happy—fill thy soul with the most delightful hopes. The grief I have experienced, has for ever subdued the furious passions of my soul: Yes! by whatever power the terrible lesson has been given, it never will be for-

gotten by me.—My love, I come to see thee; I shall bring this letter: when you have read it, say nothing; do not answer me; one of thy looks will inform me of thy most secret thoughts.

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## LETTER LXVIII.

MADemoiselle D'ALBEMAR TO MADAME DE LEBENSEI.

Dijon, June 14, 1791.

I SHALL be at Paris, madam, the day after you receive this letter; prepare Delphine for my arrival. Oh! my poor Delphine! in what state am I to find her? She will be better, I hope: her youth and your care will have saved her.—Alas! how is it in my power to promote her happiness? But she has named me, you say, and that is a sufficient reason for me to fly to her.

I beg of you, madam, to give me as few occasions as possible of seeing company. You know, not, perhaps, how much I shall suffer on arriving at Paris: but no consideration can withhold me, when a person so dear to me is in danger. Adieu, madam—I proceed this moment to continue my journey.

LOUIZA D'ALBEMAR.

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## LETTER LXIX.

MADAME DE LEBENSEI TO MONSIEUR DE LEBENSEI.

You may send for me to-morrow, my dear Henry. The sister-in-law of Madame d'Albemar has been here these two days. Delphine is better, notwithstanding the emotions she experienced in consequence of the presence of her friend; and my cares are not now necessary, though no friendship can be more tender than mine for her. I am anxious to return to my family. Life is painful to me when separated from my husband and my child.

Madame d'Albemar has received a letter from Leonce, which, I believe, has calmed the perturbations of her mind; for she has since recovered a portion of that amiable and lively spirit which renders her so interesting. I shall never be able to describe to you the expressions of joy and gratitude which animated the looks of Leonce at each word she spoke. His conduct, since the life of Delphine appeared in danger, has really interested me. It has exhibited new proofs of the most

exquisite sensibility. When she was in pain, Leonce would cling to the posts of her bed with a sort of convulsive motion, still more alarming than the situation of his mistress. Sometimes he would place himself before her, watching her countenance with looks so fixed and so penetrating, that he anticipated the changes she was to undergo, and described the stages of her indisposition to the physicians, with a solicitude and sagacity, which astonished them, notwithstanding their long experience and habits of observation. When he was conversing with them the other day, did you not observe with what art he made his inquiries, the desire he showed of discovering their sentiments, and at the same time his anxiety to avert any unfavourable answer? While looking at him, I was convinced, that had the physicians said they despaired of her recovery, he would have fallen dead at their feet.

Since you left us, Delphine's convalescence has become more apparent; his attentions are still as unremitting. When she is asleep, his countenance changes on hearing the least noise that might awake her. Sometimes he tries to amuse her by reading; but if her eyes close while she listens to him, he remains immoveable in the same place for hours together: in vain is he solicited to come out and breathe the fresh air—with eyes moistened with tears he continues to contemplate that beautiful and enchanting creature, whom death had nearly torn from him. Indeed I find no difficulty in excusing Delphine, when I see how she is loved.

The affectionate proofs of friendship which Mademoiselle d'Albemar has shown her sister, have afforded her infinite pleasure; but it appeared to me that M. de Mondeville was extremely troubled on the arrival of Mademoiselle d'Albemar. He imagined, I suppose, that she was come to carry away Delphine; and if I may judge from some words which dropped from him, this project would not be easily effected. It is, however, necessary that they should be separated for some time. A lady of my acquaintance has assured me, that her reputation begins to suffer in the world. Leonce was, on one occasion, met returning at a very late hour from Bellerive; his daily visits there are known; and the warmth with which he defended Delphine, when she devoted herself so generously for us, gave consistence to those vague suspicions which existed before.

The reports which were circulated respecting M. de Serbellane are still recollected; and though they were formally contradicted by the noble conduct of Madame d'Ervin, before she took the veil, you well know, that in a country where a reply to such accusations is never heard, justification is almost useless. One false story is sufficient to stain the purity of female reputation. It might be recovered in a society where the importance attached to virtue, would produce an inquiry



into facts; but in Paris, nobody thinks of taking this trouble. We, my dear Henry, have both been the victims of opinion; but you can brave all its unfavourable impressions. The mind of Leonce, however, is, in this respect at least, less vigorous than yours. Would it not, therefore, be better that Delphine did not put it to that trial?

In the mean time M. de Mondeville has no suspicion of the rumours which secretly threaten to undermine the character of her he loves. He has not been in public since Delphine became indisposed; he divides his time between her and his wife, and I believe he is very anxious to obtain the friendship of Madame d'Albemar. She seems very grateful for the deference and attention he pays to her. The natural disadvantages of her person inspire her with so much timidity, that she requires encouragement to enable her to enter a room, or to speak in her low tone of voice a few words which are always marked with good sense, though pronounced with great diffidence.

How unfortunate, my dear friend, is it to be thus deprived of all confidence in one's self, and rendered incapable of finding a support in the kind affections of a companion of the other sex! Had I been formed like Mademoiselle d'Albemar, in vain would my heart and mind have been the same they now are—doubtless I should have loved you, but your love would never have recompensed mine!

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## LETTER LXX.

DELPHINE TO MADAME DE LEBENSEL.

Paris, July 6.

How unfortunate that the indisposition of your son prevented you from coming to me yesterday! I regret it extremely. A tender and melancholy reflection—a feeling, perhaps, connected with the weakness in which my indisposition has left me, seems to tell me that I have enjoyed my last day of happiness. Why then did not you share it with me? When my friends celebrated my convalescence, ought not you to have been present? Your kind attentions have saved my life; and though existence should be of no benefit to me, I shall ever cherish the sentiment which inspired you with the desire of prolonging my days.

You have already observed the attention which Leonce pays to my sister-in-law. He is solicitous to obtain her favour because he supposes that I wish to choose her as the arbitress of

our fate. We have had no conversation on this subject; but there exists so perfect an intelligence between our hearts, that he discovers my thoughts even while they are but obscurely formed in my own mind.

Mademoiselle d'Albemar has, from respect to her brother, introduced M. de Valorbe to my house. Leonce, who had given orders that he should not be admitted while I was indisposed, made opposition when he was brought by her. I feel the pleasure of our intimacy much diminished by the presence of M. de Valorbe. But Leonce is so desirous of pleasing my sister-in-law, that he will contradict her in nothing.

I observe, however, for these some days past, that every time the departure of the King is mentioned, and the cruel manner in which he was brought back to Paris, Leonce endeavours to make it understood, that he considers it time to take an active part in the present political disputes. It is easy for me to perceive that his intention is, to show me that he intends to leave France, and serve against her, if I separate from him.

I sought an opportunity of telling Leonce, that as I had not the resolution to plunge myself again into that state of uncertainty which had nearly cost me my life, I intended to leave it to my sister to decide on the conduct I should pursue. I wished, at the same time, to assure him that I was ignorant of her opinion; for, from the fear of giving pain to me, she has hitherto avoided saying a word on my situation. But yesterday evening, about six o'clock, as I was stepping down stairs, for the first time, to my garden, Leonce and my sister-in-law proposed to me to go to Bellerive; your husband, who had come to see me, also advised me to go; and Monsieur de Valorbe thought proper to join in the same request. I should have wished to return alone to scenes where I had so many recollections to indulge; but I yielded to the desire of my friends: I asked for Isore, who is now become more dear to me, in consequence of the affection she showed me during my illness; I was told she had gone out with her governess, and we departed. The carriage stunned me a little: I complained on the road that we would arrive there at night; but, as nobody seemed to be uneasy about that, I allowed them to carry me along. My strength was completely exhausted by the indisposition, which has been succeeded by a state of languor and reverie; and I have not yet been able to recover the power of thinking with order, or willing with precision.

We proceeded directly into my house, the doors of which were opened, and I was astonished none of my servants met us as we entered; but the moment I opened the drawing-room, I observed that the whole garden was illuminated, and I heard the sweet sound of distant music. I immediately comprehended the design of Leonce; and whether owing to my

still feeble state, or to the powerful emotion I always experience from every attention from him, I felt my cheek covered with tears, on the idea of a fête given by Leonce, to celebrate my escape from death.

I went into the garden, and found it was lighted in a manner altogether new; the lamps were so completely concealed by the leaves of the trees, that they could not be perceived—it seemed a new kind of day; the light was more mild than that of the sun, but it rendered not less visible all the objects of nature. The stream which crosses my park reflected the lights which were placed on each of its banks, but was concealed from our view by the flowers and shrubs which covered its margin. My garden was every where enchanting. I still recognised the spots where Leonce had told his love, but the remembrance of my pains was effaced; my enfeebled imagination was incapable of creating any alarm for the future: I had not sufficient vigour to look beyond the present moment, with which all my faculties were delightfully occupied. The music tended to continue this feeling. I have often described to you its empire over my soul! The musicians were not seen. We merely heard the soft and harmonious sounds of wind-instruments, wafted towards us as if they had descended from heaven; what language indeed is better suited to angels, than that melody which has more power over all the affections of the soul, than the most sublime eloquence! It seems to express those indescribable, but exquisitely delicate feelings, which speech never can represent.

Hitherto I had contemplated only the decorations of the fête; but on turning an alley I observed, on some steps of turf, my sweet Isore surrounded with young girls, and behind them some inhabitants of Bellerive, whom I did not know. Isore came running to me, and begun to sing some verses, with which she meant to honour me; but her emotion did not permit her to proceed. She threw herself into my arms with that grace of infancy which seems to belong to another world than ours, and said to me—"Mamma, I love you; ask no more of me, I love you." I pressed her to my heart, and I could not help thinking of her poor mother. "Theresa!" said I to myself, "must I alone receive those innocent caresses which thou hast sacrificed to thy broken heart!" Leonce presented to me, in succession, all the inhabitants of the village to whom I had done any little services: he knew, in detail, all I had performed; and while he repeated the circumstances of every transaction, I never thought of interrupting him. I allowed myself to be praised by him, that I might enjoy the pleasure of his voice, of his looks, of every thing which afforded me proofs of his love.

At last he introduced to me those old men whom I have had the happiness of comforting, and said to them: "You who pass

your days in prayer, return thanks to Heaven for preserving her to whom you owe so many of the blessings of your life! We had almost lost her," added he, while his voice was stifled by his feelings—"we had almost lost her;" and that moment death menaced the young men much more than the old; "but she is restored to us. Let us then celebrate this day; and if there be any of your wishes which I can accomplish, you will obtain every thing from me in the name of my happiness." At that moment I was afraid that M. de Valorbe was near us, and that these words would explain to him the sentiments of Leonce: but your husband, who has a degree of foresight with respect to his friends, which is altogether marvellous, had drawn him into a political dispute, in which he was so warmly engaged that he remained nearly an hour away from us.

When the dancing began, my sister-in-law, Leonce, and I, returned slowly towards that part of the garden which was particularly reserved for us, and which surrounded the house. Here we were again delighted with the aërial music, the masked lamps, and experienced all those mild agreeable sensations, which so perfectly accord with the state of the soul, in a period of convalescence. The weather was serene, the sky pure: I felt impressions altogether new to me. If reason could believe in supernatural causes;—if there existed a human creature, who merited that the Supreme Being should derange his laws for her, I would have supposed that, during these few hours, some extraordinary presentiments announced to me, that I should soon pass into another world. All external objects vanished gradually from before me, I lost all bodily power, my ideas were distracted; but the fulness of my heart acquired a new force, and all my internal feelings became more vigorous; my attachment to Leonce was never so strong, and yet it never was so pure and completely disengaged from all the ties of life! My head reclined on his shoulder. He said to me several times, in the accent of fear, "My dear, my dear! what is the matter?"—I could not answer him: my soul was half separated from the earth. At last the measures taken to recover me, made me open my eyes, and I found myself between my sister and Leonce.

He regarded me in silence; his perfect delicacy would not permit him to ask a question, even on a day when his endearing attentions gave him new claims; but it was not necessary he should inquire, to induce me to answer him.—"Leonce," said I, clasping his hands in mine, "I give to my sister the power of pronouncing on our destiny. See her to-morrow, speak to her; and whatever be her determination, I shall regard it as the decree of Heaven."—"What do you require of me?" interrupted my sister.—"My father, my husband, my protector, live again in you," I replied; "judge of my situation; you now know, Leonce, I have nothing more to say."

My sister made no reply. Leonce was silent, and seemed to me absorbed in the most profound reflections. Your husband and M. de Valorbe rejoined us, and we returned to Paris. M. de Valorbe and M. de Lebensei conversed together, on the way, on subjects with which we did not interfere.

What use will Louisa make of the power which I have given to her? Perhaps she will pronounce that we must separate! But I hope she will allow me still some farther time; and if I have time, who knows whether I shall live? You know not how much, in certain situations, disease, and the debility which succeeds it, tend to tranquillize the soul. Life is no longer regarded as certain, and the intensity of grief is diminished by a confused idea, that every thing with regard to us may soon be completely ended. In this manner I explain to myself the calm I experienced at the moment when a resolution was to be decided, the very thought of which would, at other times, have been terrible to me. I resist grief. My faculties are no longer the same. Do I remain myself? Alas! I know not whether I shall not to-morrow again feel the return of all the sorrows I fancy I have subdued!

I shall send you an account of the decree pronounced on my fate. You interest yourself in my happiness;—you have assured me you do;—and you have given me a thousand proofs of your affection. My heart shall never conceal any thing from you. Adieu! this long letter has fatigued me. But I wish you had been present at this fête, for no one more contributed to my recovery.

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## LETTER LXXI.

MADAME D'ALEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Paris, July 8.

I AM much better pleased with writing to you, than with conversing with you, my dear Delphine; I do not wish to prolong your anxiety, and I do not feel strength enough, this evening, after the long conversation I have had with Leonce, to support a fresh emotion. It is your wish, that I should become the umpire of your fate: but is that wish dictated by weakness, or by courage? I know not which: but, whatever it may cost me, I cannot induce myself to reject your confidence: and as I have united my own destiny with yours, I have, as it were, a privilege to interfere in the most important decision in your life.

Still I am at a loss, what counsel to impart; I ought, naturally, to feel more resolution than yourself, and perhaps I shall discover less: it is my duty to encourage you in a most pain-

ful effort, and the effect of my advice, perhaps, will invalidate the motives that might support you in the conflict. I shall adopt a plan of conduct contrary to your expectation; but as I sacrifice myself to the counsels which I propose for your adoption, I am convinced, at least, that my opinion is not influenced by personal interest, which frequently fatally biasses the conduct of mankind.

It is possible, that you may find but an indifferent guide in me; I know not much of the world, and the spectacle of contending passions, which is entirely novel to me, too forcibly agitates my soul. Still, however, after a pretty long observation of Leonce's conduct and sentiments, I do not think myself authorized to advise you to separate from him at this peculiar time. The excessive grief which he expressed to me, and that more corroding grief which he in vain attempted to conceal, the fatal resolutions which, in the present peculiar political circumstances of France, you alone are able to prevent him from adopting; every circumstance, in fine, contributes to alarm me for your safety, should you pursue a plan which is now too insupportable for you both. Delphine! as you have been the means of exciting so violent a passion in the breast of Leonce, it is the duty of a soul so sensible to manifest the most anxious and delicate concern for that impassioned character. I do not pretend to determine the precise limits of morality, and of love, as it has been my lot not to have been practically qualified to decide: but it seems to me, after the marriage of Leonce, you ought to have separated from him; but you ought not, now, to break his heart, by making him a sudden sacrifice to *unseasonable* virtues.

I know not whether Leonce's accomplishments may not have had too much influence on my opinion; but, I confess that, if there be any species of glory for a woman beyond the path and limits of morality, that glory consists undoubtedly in being beloved by such a man. His distinguished qualities do not, certainly, furnish a motive strong enough to induce you to sacrifice your principles to him; but you are bound to endeavour to reconcile them with his happiness; and a character so eminent imposes some duties on all who may influence his fate. While I speak to you thus, believe me, that I have solemnly bound myself not to leave you yet, notwithstanding my great distance from Paris; and I shall wait till you are able to set off with me, without endangering the life of Leonce. You have offered me an apartment in your house, and I accept it: M. de Mondeville submits to the condition of seeing you, only in my company; and he protests, that considering every ground of his apprehensions, he will be happy with your presence only, with your conversation, and that charm which you know so well to spread around you, and the sweet influence of which I have myself so often ex-

perienced. I request you, my dear Delphine, to make an essay of this new kind of life; it will calm, by degrees, the violent sentiments of Leonce, and perhaps, one day you may experience together the pure enjoyment of friendship alone.

What I am persuaded of, at least as far as my understanding will allow, is, that it would be inconsistent to introduce so much rigour after so much weakness, and to cease suddenly seeing Leonce, after having passed six months almost entirely in his company. Permit me to tell you, my dearest friend, that perfect virtue always preserves a degree of doubt and uncertainty; but when we indulge some slender faults, our duties become recomplicated, and the relations of our conduct less simple; and you must not think to atone for every thing by an inconsiderate sacrifice, which will lacerate the heart of him whose love you have accepted. If you separate from Leonce before you have, if possible, mitigated the sorrow which the idea of separation afflicts him with, you will be guilty of an action as barbarous as it is inconsistent; and you will deliver him over to despair, which will be caused by that very passion which you yourself have excited.

In allowing myself to deliver a counsel, which the austerity of virtue perhaps would condemn, I have reflected deeply, and considered my own feelings in such a case. It is possible, that never having been the object of any sentiment of love, I may be less accustomed to the compassion which it inspires; it is possible that having never triumphed over my own heart, I may hesitate to recommend a sacrifice, the force and value of which I have never calculated; and it is possible, especially as I have passed my sorrowful life without having been the object of any attachment, that I may tremble to destroy the image which such a blessing presents before me. It belongs to you, to judge of the motives which have influenced my opinion; but, whatever may have been their cause, it was my duty to state them to you.

Convinced as I am, that if, in the actual disposition of Leonce, you persist in your resolution to leave him, you will expose him to inevitable death, I cannot possibly advise you to depart. In advising you to such a measure, I should suffer as much, as in doing an unjust and cruel action; and therefore I shall give you no such advice.

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## LETTER LXXII.

DELPHINE TO MADAME DE LEBENSEL.

Paris, July 12.

My sister has determined that I ought not to depart: such is the irresistible influence of Leonce over her sentiments

This circumstance is, perhaps, my own best excuse, as I had promised to abide entirely by her decision. She sacrifices her taste to my happiness; she desires to stay with me, to watch over my destiny. The promises of Leonce, the reflections which I made during my long illness, every thing inspires me with confidence in him and in myself. I therefore have experienced, my dear Eliza, a very pleasing sensation of tranquillity, for some days past; but still it is lawful for me to refer, from my own conscience, to the opinion of another person? I know not that it is; but I had no longer any power to direct myself, and I experienced so much anxiety, that it was reasonable in me to feel some concern for my condition, and seek for myself, as I would for another, some kind of resource to mitigate the troubles which I could no longer endure. As I have chosen for my umpire the most upright and purest soul in the world, have I not done enough? and what more can be expected from me?

Leonce was yesterday perfectly happy. My sister looked at us both with tenderness, and I thought we were enjoying the purest pleasures of innocence. Is it impossible for them to exist in our situation? or is this a farther instance of the illusions of love? Nevertheless I repeated, when I gave my consent to stay there, that, if Matilda felt any uneasiness from my presence, I should depart; but she has visited me twice or thrice since my recovery: she employed herself in writing every day she came to see me in my illness; and I could perceive nothing, either in her manners or deportment, which could give me room to suspect her disposition towards me: she has the air of the most perfect tranquillity. I have no conception, how she can be married to such a man as Leonce, and can love him sincerely, without any exalted sentiments of passion, or any thing like the inquietude which such sentiments inspire.

I am unwilling to return to Bellerive, because that solitary manner of living is too dangerous for me. I am apprehensive, moreover, that I have done myself some injury in the opinion of the world, by absenting myself from society. Leonce has seen nobody since my illness; but is it certain that he will hear nothing respecting the slanders against me, which may hurt his feelings? Yesterday Madame d'Artenas came to see me, when I was without company: she seemed to me rather embarrassed in her conversation, and addressed frequent consolations to me, without acquainting me on what subject they were intended: she assured me of her support, without telling me what danger I was to encounter with it, and scattered at random her general ideas upon reason and philosophy, in a manner no way comfortable to her habitual character. I wished to prevail on her to explain herself; and she answered me in a vague manner, that every thing would be properly ar-



ranged when I should reappear in the world; and not wishing to enter into any details with me, she pressed me very much to come to see her. As far as I know Madame d'Artenas, her impressions are all derived from the same source; that is, the drawing-rooms of Paris; her universe is in them, and her mind is totally concentrated within those busy circles. Nevertheless, she has, upon such a soil, a good share of independence and generosity; but having no idea that any happiness or consideration can be found, except in the best company in France, she either condoles with, or congratulates you, in exact proportion to the disposition of that company towards you, as if there existed no other object of pursuit in the world. I am persuaded, that she would have at last spoken with frankness to me, if my sister had not at that instant come in; and she laid hold of this circumstance as a pretext for her departure, repeating to me, in a friendly manner, that she relied on seeing me every evening, when there was company at her house.

May you not have learned something, my dear Eliza, which confirms the observations of Madame d'Artenas? It is not to you, who have sacrificed opinion to love, that I ought to express that kind of uneasiness which it causes me; but how can I avoid suffering on account of any circumstance that will make Leonce unhappy? The public affairs which engage the attention of your husband, bring him more in contact with society than you generally are; and I therefore conjure you to discover, by his means, every thing that concerns me, and every thing that Leonce will not fail to know, as soon as he returns to the busy world. On a subject so delicate, you are the only person I would venture to interrogate: unless to intimate friends, we are tender of communicating our uneasiness respecting the discourses that are held about us; and there are very few who do not derive, from this species of confidence, a reason for being less inclined to the person who imparts it to them.

Send me word, therefore, about what you know, and pardon me for this letter, which can only be authorized by your perfect friendship.

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## LETTER LXXIII.

DELPHINE TO MADAME DE LEBENSEI.

Your answer, my dear Eliza, has not entirely satisfied me: I could perceive that it was your intention to make me easy; but the sincerity of your character would not permit you to employ any artifice for that purpose. You must know, I am

certain, every thing which I have but too well observed, since my attempt to return once more into society. Indeed, my position is not entirely the same; I do not yet stand on a bad footing with the world, but I do not perceive myself so well established in opinion, nor in style so solid and so splendid as before.

Yesterday, for instance, I went to Madame d'Artenas's; and as my sister-in-law feels an invincible repugnance to show herself in company, I did not request her to accompany me. On my arrival, I perceived several carriages of ladies of my acquaintance, which followed me; and without reflecting on what I was doing, I stopped some time on the staircase, in order to enter at the same time with them. Before now, it was not disagreeable to me to appear alone; but yesterday an indescribable uneasiness prevented me from wishing to be so. My reception was apparently as warm as usual; but I was far from feeling, in this company, a degree of pleasure equal to that which I had before experienced in it.

I attached some importance to every trifling circumstance; the attentions of Madame d'Artenas seemed to me rather too marked, and had too much the air of a supposition, on her part, that it was necessary to give me confidence, and to point out to others the conduct which they should follow with respect to me. The coldness of some ladies, which I should not have noticed on any other occasion, a coldness which was occasioned by circumstances foreign to my thoughts, gave me so much uneasiness, that I could not take a lively part in the conversation, as I formerly did, with so much good-will. Conversation was no longer an amusement, an agreeable and diversified relaxation for me: I made observations on every word and every motion, like an ambitious courtier at a levee. But in reality, was not he on whom I depend, in the midst of the company? It struck me, that I could perceive some shades of confusion in the countenance of Leonce; he was more circumspect in his conduct, and more cautious in concealing his sentiments, than I had ever remarked before: what I felt was not trouble, but every foreboding symptom of it.

Having been, from my infancy, accustomed to nothing but the respectful attentions of the men, and the friendship of the women; being independent by my situation and my fortune, having never entertained an idea, that any other relations could subsist between myself and others, but the relations of good offices on my side, and those of gratitude and affection on theirs; this was the first time that I beheld society as a sort of hostile power, which threatened me with its arms, should I ever provoke it again.

I need not tell you, my dear Eliza, that none of these reflections would have presented themselves to my mind, were I not most scrupulously attentive to preserve, in Leonce's eyes,

that splendour of reputation which pleases him, and which he so much desires to enjoy. If society should oncé become less agreeable to me, I should bid adieu to it for ever; for I am not so weak as to be afflicted on the score of opinion, possessing, as I do, a character which naturally inclines me to treat it with contempt; but what concerns me most, in my present situation, is, that my sentiments respecting Leonce expose me to censure, and the object for whom I would cheerfully brave this censure, is a thousand times more feelingly alive to it than myself. Nevertheless, since the evening at Madame d'Artenas's, I have noticed nothing in my friend's manner, which testified the least uneasiness on his part; I could only suspect it from expressions, still more affectionate and tender, which he addressed to me the following day.

M. de Mondeville will certainly soon go to Cernay: by accustoming himself to see M. de Lebensei every day during my illness, he has laid aside the political prejudices which prepossessed him against that gentleman, and is now penetrated with esteem for his character, and admiration for his talents. He feels the sincerest friendship for you, my dear Eliza; and if, by any expression of his, you may learn that he is troubled about my situation in the world, inform me of it, I conjure you, without any hesitation or ceremony. It is the only subject on which Leonce would not speak to me with downright confidence; judge then, my dear Eliza, how much it imports me, that I should possess every information on this head.

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## LETTER LXXIV.

DELPHINE TO MADAME DE LEBENSEI.

Paris, August 1.

LEONCE has told you nothing, and I have learned nothing new from Madame d'Artenas, or any other person. I hope, therefore, that my imagination may have exaggerated the causes of my alarm; but as soon as one trouble ceases, another takes its place; and it seems that the faculty of suffering must be kept in constant exercise. The assiduities of M. de Valorbe begin visibly to displease Leonce; and his condescension to my sister, is almost entirely exhausted on this account: I do not well know how to keep M. de Valorbe at a distance, without giving him room to accuse me of the most flagrant ingratitude; and you will be able to judge yourself, whether, after what has happened, I ought not to seek some pretext to avoid his visits. He endeavoured to find out my sister yesterday, and declared to her, that he had discovered my attachment to

Leonce. His first determination, as he said, was to have challenged Leonce; but considering that it would be the surest way to lose my favour, he discovered that the most eligible method, would be to force me from an attachment, which compromised my reputation, morals, and happiness; he came, therefore, to my sister, to conjure her to determine me to marry him. It is certainly a curious connexion of ideas, which induces a man to desire to marry me the more eagerly, the more attachment he discovers me to entertain for another man. But such a man is M. de Valorbe; his vanity would be flattered by obtaining my hand, particularly as it would furnish him with a sort of triumph over Leonce, whose superiority makes him uneasy; and, though he loves me sincerely, he gives himself less concern about my sentiments respecting himself, than about the external preference which he desires me to grant him. He is a man who learns from others, whether he himself is happy or not, and who must excite envy, in order to be content with his own situation. His pride attacks and overcomes whatever good qualities he may possess in other respects; and though I am apprehensive of his anger, I feel that I must be compelled to wound his feelings by a downright refusal.

For several days past, I have repeated to my sister, how much I was alarmed, lest she should repent for bringing M. de Valorbe so often into my company. But this morning she came to me; and what, perhaps, will sufficiently astonish you, made me a formal proposal of marrying him. At first, she assured me, that he loved me to an excess approaching to idolatry, and that the greater part of those faults which disgusted me with him when in company, arose from his embarrassment in my presence. "He is a man," said she to me, "whom his good fortune and happiness will always keep in temper: I cannot answer for his conduct in adversity; but as in all probability he will be delivered from every apprehension on that head, if he has the good fortune to marry you, my dear Delphine, you may rely with safety on the general goodness of his character. I will allow, that after having loved Leonce, you will never feel a strong attachment to any other man; but in a marriage of reason and convenience, you may taste the blessing of being a mother, and believe me, my dear friend, it is a matter of such difficulty to marry the man of one's choice, and there are so many chances against happiness, that Providence, perhaps, has decreed, that female felicity should consist, almost totally, in the sensations of the maternal state. That forms the recompense of the sacrifices which their destiny demands, and the only blessing which can console them for the loss of beauty and of youth."

I must confess to you, my dear Eliza, that I was mortally offended with my sister, who was herself the first to declare, that I could not separate from Leonce, without the most bar-

barous cruelty—and she to come now to me, with a proposal of downright treachery against him! As I expressed my sentiments to her with great warmth, she interrupted me by asserting, that she now provided me with the only means of restoring Leonce to his proper duties, and the natural avocations of his life. She assured me, that, as long as I should remain disengaged, Leonce would never make an effort against his inclinations to renounce me. She repeated to me, likewise, every thing that is usually said on a similar situation, when persons, though otherwise possessed of some sensibility, can form no conception of a passion which supplies the place of every thing in the universe, and in which no enjoyments, hopes, or considerations are to be found derived from ordinary reason and sensibility, that are not internally rejected by the lover with contempt. Still it is a pleasing reflection to indulge the sentiment of profound contempt, which the heart entertains for every rival of the favoured and beloved object of our affections!

Our conversation on this subject was soon at an end: some expressions of mine furnished my sister with such an idea of impossibility, as would put it out of the power of any human creature to change my resolution, and I thought of nothing more but supplicating Louisa to remove M. de Valorbe from my presence. She promised to take that business in hand, but entertained little hopes of success, either on account of his natural obstinacy, or from a secret reluctance of disobliging a man who had saved her brother's life.

My dear Eliza, I request of you to ask M. de Lebensei for his advice in this my critical and perplexing situation. He is acquainted with M. de Valorbe, for they often converse together on political subjects. Although M. de Valorbe be, in his heart, the enemy of the revolution, he nevertheless affects to pass for a philosopher, and gives himself much trouble to explain to your husband, that he supports prejudices only as a statesman, but, as a profound thinker he disdains them. M. de Lebensei sees something very inconsistent in this profundity, and then M. de Valorbe, smiles, as if your husband pretended not to understand him, and as if they were both like a pair of soothsayers, one of whom had the air of not understanding the other. In any other disposition of mind, I should find amusement in these discussions between M. de Valorbe, who wished to be admired by both parties, and your husband, who argues only for what he conceives to be the truth; between M. de Valorbe, who pretends to despise mankind, merely for the purpose of concealing the importance he attaches to their suffrages, and your husband, who, being indifferent to the opinion of what is termed the world, is notwithstanding untainted with misanthropy, because he never miscalculates his pretensions, or his success. What engages

my attention, is to know, whether M. de Lebensei, may not have discovered, in the playful sallies of M. de Valorbe's vanity, some method of fixing his attention upon some idea or pursuit, which may divert him from the violent prosecution of his addresses to me.

I am extremely uneasy on account of any events which may alarm the pride of Leonce, or the vanity of M. de Valorbe. When he is in company with M. de Mondeville, he feels himself restrained by that dignity of character, which imposes, even on Leonce's enemies, an awful respect in his presence; but I am convinced that, in secret, he proudly revolts against the involuntary impression of Leonce's dignity; and any effort which his vanity may dictate to relieve him from a state of painful inferiority, must naturally tend to incline him to some measure of violence and indecorum. Once more, my dear Eliza, I pray you to consult your husband on this delicate situation, and be cautious to keep from Leonce's knowledge what I have in confidence imparted to you with respect to M. de Valorbe.

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## LETTER LXXV.

DELPHINE TO MADAME DE LEBENSEI.

Paris, Aug. 7, 11 o'clock in the morning.

How well-founded were my apprehensions! I now send to you without the knowledge of Leonce, to beseech M. de Lebensei to come to us; and write this letter to you, while my valet is gone to procure a horse to convey it to Cernay. Acquaint your husband with every thing, deliver him my letter to read, that he may, if possible, before he comes to us, devise some method of saving us from ruin. Fatal incident! my evil genius still pursues me.

Yesterday, Leonce informed me that there was a grand fête in preparation at one of his relations, who lives in the same street with me; he added, that he thought it expedient to be present on the occasion, in order that his absence from society might not be too much noticed. It occurred to me, that on the same morning M. de Valorbe had spoken with much confidence of his pretensions respecting me; and I had reason to apprehend, that Leonce would be informed of every circumstance at this assembly, where there must be such a number of persons collected together; but as I could not assign any reasonable motive for my absence, I was silent, and my sister coinciding with Leonce, he left us shortly after, and went in search of one of his friends, who was to accompany him to the fête. A quarter of an hour afterwards, M. de Valorbe

came to my house in great confusion, and acquainted us, that having rather imprudently interfered in some business concerning the flight of the King; he had, at that instant, received advice that an order of arrest had been issued against him, which was to be put in execution in a few hours; he came, therefore, to request of me an asylum in my house for this night, and to beg of me to obtain from your husband's intercession, some means of departing this day to join his regiment, and to continue with it, until this affair shall have been finally adjusted.

You are sensible, my dear Eliza, that if it were possible to hesitate, that an asylum cannot be decently refused! I granted his request; and it was agreed on, that my sister, who lodged in an apartment belonging to one of her relations, with whom she had put up on her arrival at Paris, should stop that night with me; that M. de Valorbe should come to my house when all the servants had retired to rest; and that Anthony only should stay up, for the purpose of giving him admittance. It was then eight o'clock in the evening; M. de Valorbe had gone to his notary's to settle some business of importance, and was to wait there as long as he conveniently could, in expectation of the appointed hour. Every thing that concerned the safety of M. de Valorbe being thus regulated, he departed, after testifying more gratitude to me than I really deserved, since at that time I was ignorant what this favour was likely to cost me.

I returned instantly to my apartment to write to Leonce, under the seal of secrecy, about every thing that passed. I had no other motive in communicating this intelligence to him, than that of acquainting him minutely with all the actions of my life; and I gave orders, that my letter should be carefully delivered to the coachman, desiring him to look for Leonce in the house where he supped, as probably he might be found there at that time. I retired to rest with perfect composure, assured as I was of the approbation of Leonce, for an action so generous, though even his own rival was the object of it.

This morning Mademoiselle d'Albemar entered my chamber, and I could discover, on her first appearance, that she was coming to announce some great misfortune: "What has happened?" cried I, with every symptom of terror.—"Nothing as yet," said she, "but listen to me, and try whether you have any resource against the cruel event which threatens us." She then acquainted me, that she had discovered, by some expressions of M. de Valorbe, that he had met Leonce the night before; but as he would not communicate to her what had passed, she had written at eight o'clock in the morning to M. de Mondeville, in such a manner as to make him believe that she was acquainted with every circumstance, and that it was useless for him to conceal any thing from her. His answer

contained a detail of the circumstance which I shall now communicate to you.

Yesterday, on coming from the ball, Leonce being out of patience on account of the crowd which prevented his carriage coming up, determined to go on foot to it, towards the end of the street. He acknowledges, that he felt much displeasure from the circumstance of several persons announcing to him my marriage with M. de Valorbe, as a very probable event. In this state of mind, however, he still felt some pleasure, as he said, in seeing my house, during my sleep; and with this intent, he chose that side of the street, which was to bring him close by my door on his return home; it was then one o'clock in the morning.

By a fatal accident, at the moment when he approached my house, M. de Valorbe, carefully concealing himself from every eye, and wrapped up in his cloak, glides along the wall, knocks at my door, which, in an instant, is opened to receive him. Leonce recognised Anthony, who held in his hand a light to show the way to M. de Valorbe. Leonce has confessed, and I believe him, that it never entered his thoughts that I had made any arrangement with M. de Valorbe; but being convinced, he said, that his conduct was occasioned by some infamous design, he rushed upon him, before he entered my house, seized him by the collar, and dragging him violently from the door, demanded of him, with much *hauteur*, what motive could induce him to come at such an hour, and in such a disguise, to Mademoiselle d'Albemar's house? M. de Valorbe, being much provoked, avoided making any reply; Leonce, in the height of his rage, seized him a second time, and desired him to follow him, with the most insulting expressions. M. de Valorbe was unarmed, and the fear of being discovered recurred to his memory; he therefore replied to M. de Mondeville in a very careless manner.—“You are sensible, I am persuaded, sir,” said he, “that after the insult which you have exposed me to, your death or mine must terminate this affair. But, I must acquaint you, that I am threatened with an arrest this night, and it is in order to withdraw myself from this danger, that Mademoiselle d'Albemar has granted me an asylum in her house. I fear I shall be pursued, if my retreat is discovered; let us therefore defer till to-morrow that satisfaction which, unquestionably, concerns me much more than you.”—At these words, Leonce, in confusion, covered his head, and retired without making any reply.

He came up with his servants, a few steps farther on; they delivered my letter; and he confessed, that after he had read it, he felt much confusion on account of his impetuosity; but, at the same time, he declares to my sister-in-law, that he must not think of endeavouring to prevent the consequence of his rashness.



When Mademoiselle d'Albemar was acquainted with the whole affair, she spoke to M. de Valorbe on the subject; he seemed mortally offended, and would not admit any idea of the possibility of a reconciliation. However, it is certain that nobody was witness to the violence of Leonce; and cannot your husband be a mediator between M. de Valorbe and M. de Mondeville? If he should obtain a passport for M. de Valorbe, will not so essential a service give him some influence over him?

I expect Leonce to come to see me every moment; but can I flatter myself with possessing the slightest power over his conduct in a case of such a nature? I shall speak to him, notwithstanding, on the subject; and at this moment I feel a calmness and composure which you would not imagine me to possess. But do you know from what it is derived? It is from the certainty of not surviving Leonce; Heaven itself cannot require it of me! But is this certainty sufficient to enable me to support the weight of woes which oppress me! What! if he should lose that life of which he makes a use so noble, if his love for me should snatch from him the days of glory and happiness which nature has destined for him! What, if his mother should demand her son of me, and load my memory with the bitterest curses! Oh! Eliza, Eliza, you have never experienced such misery as mine; and I, who have shed a world of tears, how far was not I from the conception of what I suffer now?—Antoine is arrived, and is again on the point of departing; in the name of Heaven do not lose an instant!

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## LETTER LXXVI.

DELPHINE TO MADAME DE LEBENSEI.

Paris, Aug. 8.

My alarms are all dissipated! I am much indebted to your husband, and even to M. de Valorbe himself. He has departed, and every thing is adjusted; but have I reason to be satisfied with my own conduct? Will not this day produce fatal effects? What, however, could I reproach myself with, when the life of Leonce was in danger? Your husband stays with us till to-morrow, and I shall have the pleasure of acquainting you with all that your Henry has done for us. But never let a single word from you, my dear Eliza, betray the secrets which I shall confide to you.

Leonce arrived yesterday morning, the moment after I had sent you my letter. There were some marks of uneasiness and embarrassment visible in his countenance; and I hastened to tell him, that if the slightest suspicion to my prejudice was

intermingled with his resentment against M. de Valorbe, I should never think of finding any comfort in our mutual attachment. I conjured him to examine his heart, whether he was desirous to ruin a proscribed man, who might be compelled to quit France, and whom the publicity of a duel must inevitably have discovered? "My dear Delphine," replied Leonce, "it is I who have insulted M. de Valorbe; he alone has the privilege of resenting the offence; I cannot consider myself as injured; and my desire in this business, must be limited to granting him the satisfaction which he shall demand." "What!" said I, "when by your own confession you have been unjust and cruel, do you think it disgraceful to atone for your offence?"—"I do not know," said he to me, "what M. de Valorbe will consider as atonement; as he is unfortunate at the present moment, I may think myself inclined to be less rigid with respect to honour; but this satisfaction I shall never make, unless in our own presence only; when I had the misfortune to offend M. de Valorbe, we were unseen and unattended by any other persons, and will he consider this a reasonable ground for accepting an apology, made without any witnesses? In his place, nothing would satisfy me; in mine, what I shall decide upon, is founded on certain rules, against which I shall never trespass." "Inexorable man!" said I to him, with lively indignation, "you have not, as yet, even designed to entertain a thought for me; do you reflect, that the subject of the present dispute will be shortly made public? and then my total ruin will be the consequence."—"It is the most profound secret," interrupted he. "Are you ignorant," replied I, "that there is no such thing as a secret? But I do not mean to insist on this motive: it is your part, and not mine, to determine its due weight. If you triumph, it is true, I am dishonoured; if you perish, I shall die: but the consideration superior to all others, is the remorse you must be a prey to, if you do not respect the situation of M. de Valorbe. Can you prevail on yourself to take him to the field when he is forced to hide himself, when you discover his retreat, when you deliver him over in these troublesome times to the tribunals, where justice is not secured? can you be guilty of such atrocity?" "My dear Delphine," replied Leonce, more affected than undecided, "I must repeat it to you, it is I who have injured M. de Valorbe; I have only to await his pleasure. Generosity is not the prerogative of the offending party; it is M. de Valorbe's duty to decide: I shall say to him, if he desires it, every thing I can reasonably say: he will judge if my apology be satisfactory or not." At this moment, M. de Lebensei, entered; Anthony had met him at the city gates, and he had orders to deliver my letter to either you or him; your excellent Henry read the letter, and did not lose an instant in coming to my house. I repeated to him,

on his arrival, what I had already said, and Leonce continued silent:—"It is my duty, in the first place," said M. de Lebensei, "to obtain information of the nature of the charges which affect M. de Valorbe; and if he is in real danger, it is fit he should take proper measures for his safety. M. de Mondeville undoubtedly wishes, above all, that M. de Valorbe may not be exposed to an arrest." "Certainly," replied Leonce, "my ill-usage of him imposes a heavy duty on me; if I be able to serve him, I will do it with earnestness and zeal: but will you permit me," said he, in a lower tone of voice, to M. de Lebensei, "to speak a few words with you in private?"—"Whence proceeds this mystery?" cried I, "Leonce! am I then unworthy to listen to you on a subject in which you think your honour is involved? Is not my life endangered as well as yours? And do you imagine, that if your glory were really compromised, I should not find in the resolution which I have formed to die with you, the power to consent to all your dangers? But, once more let me say, you have been exceedingly unjust towards M. de Valorbe; he is in a state of proscription; on this supposition, your inflexible pride ought to submit."—"Well then," replied Leonce, "I shall say nothing to M. de Lebensei, which you may not hear; besides, I can acquaint him with nothing respecting the conduct I ought to pursue; what he would do, I will do."—"I only request," said M. de Lebensei, "that you will wait for information, which I shall immediately look for, respecting the situation of M. de Valorbe; in a few hours, I shall know every particular."

M. de Lebensei then left us, to take the charge of this business on himself, and, immediately before he departed, said to me; "M. de Mondeville is very right in some respects, for it is M. de Valorbe who ought to decide on this affair; you had better speak to him this morning, and try to calm his resentment." At this instant I wished to pass into my sister-in-law's apartment, where I might find M. de Valorbe. Leonce detained me, and said: "The compassion which I feel for an unhappy man, the wrongs which I have done him, the apprehension of committing your reputation, all these motives throw obstacles in my way, and prevent me from embracing that simple line of conduct, which on such occasions as the present is so convenient and honourable. But, I conjure you, my dear friend, do not allow yourself to employ one word, in my absence, that I may be compelled to disavow. Consider that it will be imagined that I approve of every thing you say; and be more proud than passionate, when the reputation of your friend is at stake. I need not recall to your recollection, that I prefer my honour to my life, and I should blush to be under the necessity of acquainting you with that sentiment for the first time; but since your sublime sensibility connects your days with mine, I have stronger grounds, on that account, for

relying on the lofty dignity of your deportment. My honour shall be yours; and in defence of your honour, my dear Delphine, you must not dread even death itself. Adieu—I must leave you now, I must stay at home the whole day, to hear some intelligence from M. de Valorbe.”—There was so much composure and dignity in the accents of Leonce, that I recovered all my resolution for awhile; but it soon failed me, when I entered my sister-in-law’s apartment, and there beheld M. de Valorbe.

Louisa retired into her closet to leave us at liberty to converse; I did not well know how to begin the conversation, as M. de Valorbe seemed resolutely determined to avoid it. I hesitated, whether I should attempt to speak sincerely to him about my regard for Leonce. Although he was not ignorant of that circumstance, I dreaded to hurt his feelings by a plain avowal in favour of another man: at first, I ventured a few words on Leonce’s repentance, when he was apprized of the disagreeable situation of M. de Valorbe. He replied to my observation in a general manner, but without employing a single expression that might lead to the topic I desired; and he, who in the moments of irritation is often transported beyond bounds, expressed himself in a calm and firm tone, and in a manner so contrary to my expectation that I was compelled to surrender all my hopes.

I considered, however, that M. de Valorbe’s resolution might depend on a fortunate inspiration, which might prompt me to the means of softening his resentment. Such a method was certainly in existence, and I invoked the powers of my mind, to inspire me with the happy discovery; but the more I felt the necessity of aid, the more doubtful and questionable it appeared. Some time had already passed, before M. de Valorbe would even permit me to begin; he turned off what I wished to say, interrupted me, and, by a thousand artifices, evaded the subject which I was eager to introduce. I felt a most painful anxiety, which he had the art to prolong; but at last, I came to a resolution to represent to him, without preamble, the irreparable injury which a public duel would inflict on my reputation; and I asked him, in plain terms, if it was reasonable, that the consideration which inclined me to grant him an asylum, should meet with such cruel remuneration. He then dropped some unmeaning expressions in reply, and told me, that the cause of his dispute with M. de Mondeville could only have been heard by a man whom he imagined that he had seen near the spot, but who was a stranger to him. I then acquainted him with a circumstance, which I took to be true at that time, in common with M. de Mondeville, which is, that the man in question was one of Leonce’s servants, who came to announce his chariot to his master, and that he had not the slightest idea of what had actually passed. M. de Valorbe appeared to consider atten-

tively this reply, for some time, and then said to me:” Well, madam, if nobody has either seen or heard us, you will not be compromised, whatever may take place between M. de Mondeville and myself.” I was not aware of this argument; and I think now, what I suspected at that very moment, that M. de Valorbe wanted to recollect himself in order to hinder me from discovering that he felt himself rather at ease, from the idea that nobody had been witness to his quarrel with Leonce. Nevertheless, whatever may have been the idea that passed through his mind, he took an opportunity to break off the conversation, and rose up to call Mademoiselle d’Albemar.

She came; and I knew not what to think, or how to conduct myself: a deadly coldness seized on me; I thought I saw before me the man who wished to take the life of him whom I loved, and my tongue was frozen when I wished to deprecate his resolution. At this moment a note from your husband was put into my hands, in which he informed me, that the charges against M. de Valorbe were of a very serious nature; that it was the most prudent proceeding for him to leave Paris without delay; and that he would furnish him with a passport, under a fictitious name, the same evening, towards night-fall; by which means he might escape unmolested: that in course of time he flattered himself it might be in his power to have the order of arrest disannulled; but for the present, M. de Valorbe would reflect on the probable danger of a discovery, in this period of general fermentation. This note I immediately delivered to M. de Valorbe, and rather indiscreetly let him perceive the sensation of hope with which it inspired me; he took notice of it, and being hurt at my supposition that the dangers impending on him should have any influence on his conduct, he returned precipitately into the apartment, and came out shortly after, with a letter in his hand for M. de Mondeville. He delivered it to one of my servants, and told him in a voice loud enough to be heard by me, to “carry it instantly according to the address.” He returned to us a few minutes afterwards, while my poor sister-in-law was in a tremour, and I could not support myself without difficulty.

Dinner was announced, and we all three sat down to table. M. de Valorbe looked at us both by turns, Louisa, and me, and the spectacle of our grief seemed to affect him, although he made efforts to suppress the emotion. During dinner, he spoke incessantly, and with more flippancy than is usually displayed under a calm and steadfast resolution. He soon became highly elevated by his own discourses, and the wine which he drank, while we continued pale and motionless, without uttering a word. At last we recovered from our bitter torments—but what a repast! it was indeed the banquet of death; and he appeared, at last, himself to be ashamed of the character which he had assumed, and felt the necessity of making an apology for his conduct.

"You have done me an essential service," said he to me, "and in return, I plunge you into affliction; but never was there a more mortal insult, and which merited more the vengeance due to a gentleman!" At these words, I flattered myself that I might, at least, be listened to on the subject, and was on the point of making a reply, when M. de Valorbe, in compliance with the natural taste he has for producing some striking effect, bespoke me thus:—"Every thing is now decided, madam; I have written to M. de Mondeville; the appointment is to take place in this very house, at six o'clock, and we shall depart together. We shall halt in the forest of Senars, ten leagues from Paris; on that spot, one of us is doomed to perish. If M. de Mondeville should fall, I shall proceed on my journey, without being recognised; if I must fall, he will return to you. Now, as you see, the words irrevocable have been pronounced; return, therefore, into your apartment, and pray to God I may be killed; you have no other hope than this." At the moment of delivering these frightful words, the clock had already struck five, the hand was advancing towards the appointed hour, and the punctuality of Leonce had never been called in question. This departure, this forest, and these murderous expressions of M. de Valorbe, all added horror to the idea of the duel. What I feared a few hours before, was nothing, in comparison with my present apprehensions; my mind became disordered—the death, the inevitable death of Leonce was before my eyes, and his murderer addressed me.

I know not what expressions of grief escaped from my bosom, but they excited a violent emotion in the breast of M. de Valorbe, and he threw himself instantly at my feet.—"What! then," says he, "you love Leonce, and do you expect that I should spare his life? I return thanks to Heaven for the insult which he has offered me, as it furnishes me with an opportunity of avenging another injury, and it is for that injury—yes, it is for that injury," said he, in a transport of rage, "that I thirst after his blood!" "Why!" cried I, "what is become of those sentiments of generosity which have procured you so much respect and esteem? Can you prevail on yourself to wish to espouse me, when you know my heart is in the possession of another?" "Yes," said he, "I do wish so; time will probably clear up the sentiments which your heart cherishes; and you will pay some regard to the duty which you owe to me. You possess such soft and amiable qualities, that if I should even become your husband before I should be blessed with your love, I should be the happiest of mankind. But otherwise, you must have victims, you must have blood, and the fatal hour is approaching; as soon as the deadly stroke is heard, I shall no longer listen to your prayers." Eliza, do not you shudder for your unhappy friend? At that moment, my

senses became disordered; I supplicated M. de Valorbe with an accent, and with words of fire; but he rejected every remonstrance, his whole imagination being engrossed with that idea which constantly recurred to him. "What can you do for me," cried he, "if I am disgraced, if the whole world should learn the insulting usage I have met with?" "Nothing will be discovered," repeated I, "absolutely nothing!" "But if this expectation proves delusive, tell me," cried he, in a fury, "tell me, you who do not promise me love, how will you enable me to endure infamy and dishonour?" "It will never reach you," replied I; "but if any uneasiness may result to you from the sacrifice which I beseech you to make, the devotion of my whole life, my gratitude, friendship, fortune, and attentions, every thing that I can bestow, shall be dedicated to your service." "Every thing that you can bestow! enchanting creature," interrupted he; "it is thyself I desire to possess; thou alone canst make me forget dishonour itself! Thou shudderest at the thought of blood, and the spectacle of approaching death affrights thee!—Swear, therefore, that I am to be thy husband; let me enjoy that glimpse of glory, that intoxicating bliss."

On pronouncing these words, he seized my hand in a transport of passion, and the clock struck six. A carriage stopped at the door, and only one instant more remained to guard against the greatest of all miseries. From what I could collect from M. de Valorbe's expression, I imagined that his resolution was not irrevocable; but still, that he would not renounce it, unless I furnished him with some pretext that might tend to keep his vanity in countenance. But he, perceiving my perplexity and silence, renewed his efforts with more zeal, and thus addressed me: "Let me be allowed to look upon this silence as an auspicious omen; let me consider it as a favourable reply; it shall be a secret between us both, and you shall have time to reflect on the result. I do not mean tyrannically to abuse a compliance extorted from you by your fears alone." At this moment, we heard Leonce's chariot entering the court, and I do not recollect what then passed in my troubled mind; but, I believe that it struck me, that a silly scruple alone would induce me to speak, when perhaps my silence only, might be the means of saving Leonce's life. On the preceding day, Madame d'Artenas had scolded me bitterly for what she called my intolerable qualities, which exposed me to every description of misfortunes, without allowing me to employ any dexterity in extricating myself from such dilemmas. Her counsels occurred to me on this occasion, and I condemned my own character, and was determined to act in opposition to it; above all, the words that might expose the life of Leonce could never find a passage from my lips. M. de Valorbe cried out in an ecstasy, that he thanked me for my silence! I did not disavow it; I

therefore deceived him; yes, gracious God! it was the first time that ever dissimulation defiled my heart! Leonce appeared—What an impression was produced by his presence on every person in the room! My sister turned aside, in order to conceal her tears; M. de Valorbe endeavoured to compose his looks; and I, who did not well know whether I had saved the life of the person I loved, or had only made myself unworthy of his regard, could scarce support myself from falling. M. de Mondeville, wishing to shorten this scene, having saluted my sister and me with that grace and nobleness of demeanour which ever charm the indifferent, requested M. de Valorbe to show him into his apartment. They both left the room at the same time, and my torments were redoubled; I had not seen Leonce since the morning, and I knew not what change the course of the day might have made in his disposition. The silence which I had, alas! too dexterously observed, was, perhaps, sufficient to disarm M. de Valorbe's resentment; or, did he not reflect, that, at such a perplexing moment he could draw no reasonable conclusion in his favour from my silence? So far, therefore, was I from feeling an alleviation of my anxiety, that it became still more oppressive, from the hope, of which I had a glimpse, and which time did not tend to confirm.

This day, which already had been too painful, was marked, still farther, by a very unfortunate accident. Madame du Marset came to my door, and inquired for Mademoiselle d'Albemar; and my servants, who had received no orders to the contrary from my sister-in-law, showed her in. She came up into the drawing-room, where I was with Mademoiselle d'Albemar; she came to pay her a visit, and to acquit herself of one of those ordinary duties of society, the coldness and insipidity of which form so striking a contrast with the violent emotions of the soul. Figure to yourself, my dear Eliza, what I must have suffered during the half-hour she continued with my sister! I could not leave the room, because I could hear the voice of Leonce and of M. de Valorbe, from the apartment in which we were at that time. I had thus an assurance that they had not as yet departed; and I strove to form an opinion, from the higher or lower key of their conversation, whether they were pacified or irritated afresh. I do not think it possible to give you a clear idea of the frightful restraint which I felt from the presence of Madame du Marset. I wished to conceal my uneasiness from her, and I betrayed it the more; I made replies to her questions, without attending to them, and in words which had no connexion with the subject of her discourse. She perceived my embarrassment, and every instant expressed her astonishment; and I am inclined to believe, that she protracted her visits from motives of malignity and curiosity. I know not how long this punishment might have endured, had not



Mademoiselle d'Albemar, being no longer able to support it, taken upon herself to tell Madame du Marset, that I was still suffering from the effects of my former illness, and that, for the present, I had some need of repose. Madame du Marset received this dismissal with a very bad grace; and I have no doubt, from what I learned afterwards, that she came with a design of reconnoitering what was transacting at my house.

When she had retired, Leonce opened the door, and came in with M. de Valorbe. I wished to ask him some questions; but the violence I suffered from Madame du Marset's visit, had thrown me into such a state, that, on attempting to speak, I fell down, almost lifeless, at the feet of Leonce. When I came to myself, I found that I had been conveyed into another apartment: Leonce held one of my hands, my sister the other, and my little Isore was weeping at the foot of my bed. The moment was soothing, my dear Eliza, when I found myself in the midst of the dearest objects of my affections, and when Leonce's eyes expressed his tender concern for me!—"My dear friend," said he to me, "why alarm yourself thus? Every thing is adjusted; every thing is according to your own wishes: be composed, and allay the emotions of a soul so full of sensibility: since you love me, I still wish to live; do not therefore entertain any apprehensions on my account."

I then requested him to let me know the particulars of his private interview with M. de Valorbe. "I thought him determined on this business," said he, "when I first arrived; but as I had seen M. de Lebensei, who gave me some causes of real alarm for M. de Valorbe, I was disposed to lend an ear to an accommodation, if he should be desirous of it. He began by asking me, if I could venture to assure him, that nothing that had passed the night before should ever be made public. I told him that I pledged him my word and honour, and likewise on the part of M. de Lebensei, that the secret should be faithfully concealed, and that I believed that nobody was acquainted with the circumstance, excepting him and myself.

"He asked me some farther questions, all relative to the possible publicity of our rencontre; and I assured him in this respect, as much as I could do myself, without however pledging myself to a positive certainty on the case; because I was in too violent a passion at that time, to attend to any thing that passed about me. M. de Valorbe stood absorbed in reflection for a few moments, and then pronounced your name, in a faint voice: he paused on a sudden, not wishing me to know, most certainly, that it was from a regard to your quiet, that he was induced to terminate the business in that manner. It was you alone, my dear Delphine, that likewise influenced my conduct, and inspired me with the sentiments of mildness and peace which determined me to an accommodation: you

were the mediating angel of peace between us. After a pause of a few moments, M. de Valorbe held forth his hand to me; and then I took the opportunity to express to him, with frankness and cheerfulness, the regret which I felt for my unpardonable violence. We then came out to rejoin you; and, from that moment, I have thought only of relieving you, and I have left M. de Lebensei and M. de Valorbe together."

At the moment when Leonce mentioned your husband's name, the latter opened my door, and said to me, with an earnestness which is not usual with him:—"Every thing is ready for M. de Valorbe's journey: he only wishes to see you for a moment, and it is proper not to require M. de Mondeville to be a witness of his grief on leaving you; but his departure must be accelerated by every means." Leonce withdrew without any hesitation; and M. de Lebensei, without losing a moment, introduced M. de Valorbe. I was touched with compassion on seeing him; for it was impossible to assume a more melancholy aspect than his: he drew near my bed; and, taking my hand, fell on his knees before me, and said to me, in a low voice: "I am now on the eve of my departure, and I know not what is to be my fate; perhaps the most untoward events await me on my way; but let my honour remain untouched, and I shall be able to face them all! But I beseech you to bear in mind, that it is for you alone I have made the sacrifice of a most just and necessary resolution: reflect," continued he, laying a singular emphasis on every word, "reflect on what your duty imposes on you with respect to me, if all my prospects are ruined for having obeyed your voice, and for having relied with confidence on your honour."—I blushed on hearing these words, which recalled to my mind a real error on my part. M. de Valorbe wished to make a longer stay; but M. de Lebensei was so eager for his departure, that he interrupted our conversation by his authority. M. de Valorbe then reclined on my hand, and bathed it with his tears. At last your husband conducted him away. As soon as M. de Valorbe's carriage had gone off, M. de Lebensei returned to us, and I asked him the reason of an emotion which I never witnessed in him before. "Alas!" replied he, "I have just learned, on my way to your house, that M. de Pierville was witness to the scene that took place last night: he had gone out, on foot, a few moments after Leonce, from the house where they had supped together. He concealed himself behind the carriages, that he might not be observed; and this day he has related, in a public company, every circumstance that he was witness to the night before. I was, therefore, extremely alarmed lest this intelligence might come to M. de Valorbe's ears before his departure; and that he in consequence, might alter his resolution, and stay behind, let whatever consequences take place." "Indeed!" cried I,

and will not M. de Valorbe be disgraced, for having avoided fighting Leonce?" M. de Lebensei endeavoured to dissipate this alarm, by assuring me, that he would succeed in destroying the effect of M. de Fierville's discourses; but though he took pains to make me easy on this head, he seemed to be troubled by a thought which he did not think proper to communicate to me.

When M. de Lebensei departed, I found myself exceedingly troubled and embarrassed: I certainly do not repent for having done every thing in my power to prevent a duel between M. de Valorbe and Leonce, and I am far from imagining myself to be bound by my silence, which was occasioned by the critical situation in which I was involved. My sister, who was witness to every circumstance on that occasion, assures me, that even M. de Valorbe himself had no reason to be persuaded that I should have formed any engagement with him, in the peculiar state which I was in at that time. If M. de Valorbe were unfortunate, I should certainly do him every service in my power; but it is in vain that I continue reasoning with myself for several hours on this matter: the joy that I felt for the peaceable termination of the business is entirely poisoned by an instance of falsehood on my part. Nothing can ever make me confess it to Leonce, and yet it was for his sake—it must, therefore, have been wrong—I am persuaded that I shall feel many moments of uneasiness from this circumstance. Faults, that take their origin from our natural character, are so much in unison with our habitual manner of thinking, that we are easily led to pardon them ourselves; but when we are drawn, and dragged, as it were, in violent opposition to our natural feelings and sentiments, we are then conscious of a painful and odious recollection, which we in vain attempt to banish from our thoughts. I beseech you, never speak to me about this circumstance, and I shall perhaps be able to forget it.

Give my warmest thanks to your Henry, for the perfect friendship I have experienced at his hands. Is your child still sick? Is it possible for you to leave me? I shall call on you, as soon as I find myself better, for my fresh sufferings have given me a relapse of my fever, and I am desired to be more cautious of my health for a little longer time,

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## LETTER LXXXIII.

MADemoiselle D'ALBEMAR TO MADAME DE LEBENSEI.

Paris, August 25.

I FEEL an inclination, my dear madam, to confide my sorrows to you, and to ask your friendly advice. Has M. de Le-

bensei acquainted you, how the base M. de Fierville, and his still more odious friend, have found out the art of aggravating, and totally misrepresenting the business of M. de Valorbe? They have spread abroad a report, that Delphine, our angelic Delphine, had given an assignation to two men on the same night; and that a misconception about the hour of appointment had been the cause of a rencounter, in which Leonce had grievously insulted M. de Valorbe. No—I could not bring myself to write to you about such a scandalous and infamous slander, without feeling my forehead glow with blushes of shame and indignation! Is it thus, then, that an innocent creature is to be punished for the excess of her generosity? Is it thus that the noblest and purest character is to be outraged with impunity? Two malignant beings, and all the rest either indifferent or weak; it is thus that a woman's character is decided on by the public of Paris.

Madame du Marset, and M. de Fierville, have taken this opportunity, it is said, of avenging themselves, for a humiliating reproof which they once received from Leonce, in defence of Madame d'Albemar's character. But, for the present, what steps must we take in order to defend her reputation? Assist me, I beseech you, and let us conceal from her especially, that she is the object of so vile a calumny. Her ill state of health confines her to her apartment, and I have advised her to admit no visitors for a time. Leonce has gone to conduct his wife to the estate which she holds as the gift of Delphine, and without which, alas! she never would have married M. de Mondeville. I should have consulted him only on this subject, as from the age of M. de Fierville we have no reason to dread any fatal consequences; but he is absent, and I am alone in the middle of a world so new and strange to me, and the influence of which I have every reason to dread. I have, nevertheless, overcome my repugnance to society; I mix in it now, and shall do so every day, and repeat what will gloriously justify my friend. Without confessing the attachment of Delphine to Leonce, I shall content myself with not denying it, as I am determined to place all my reliance on the solid strength of truth. Indeed, I have no other resource; I am here a stranger without attractions, without friends to support me, and rendered timid by my want of figure, and my ignorance of the forms of life. But still I love Delphine; and, in pleading for her, I am conscious of defending the justest and most reasonable of all causes.

I know not whom to address, I know not what methods are usually resorted to in this city, in order to repulse the poisoned shafts of calumny. I will therefore say every thing my indignation inspires me with; perhaps I shall, at last, triumph over envy, the only species of malevolence my sweet and charming friend has reason to dread. I had never formed an idea of the

evil consequences of the hostility of public opinion, when once the art of deluding it is sufficiently practised and understood. Nothing will persuade me, that those who are usually termed friends, do not expose us to more injuries than our declared enemies. They are loud and frequent in their boast of pretended services, and we cannot distinguish with accuracy, whether they do not exaggerate the attacks which they triumph over for our sakes, in order to add greater force and value to their fortitude and courage in our behalf. Others confine themselves to the assurances which they make us, of resolutely taking up our defence in all cases whatsoever; and you can never bring them to an exact definition of their meaning of the expression, "*all cases whatsoever*;" it is more to their taste, to give it a vague and random sense. Some persons advise me to take Delphine into Languedoc; and when I strive to prove to them that this is a very ill-chosen moment to depart, when we should silence and confound so base a calumny, they repeat the same counsel to me a second time, without paying any regard whatsoever to my reply. Their minds are totally occupied with the advice which they give, their own vanity is concerned in it, and they believe themselves to be exempted from any farther efforts in your behalf, if you do not implicitly adopt their opinion: it is, therefore, more easy to defend ourselves against open enemies, than to follow the exact line of conduct which such friends so rigorously impose. They serve only to encourage our enemies, by proving to them what a weak resistance they are to expect; and yet, if they break with us, they only render our situation still more deplorable. Would not they begin their phrases of renunciation with these words, *I loved Madame d'Albemar, but I confess that at present I see no possibility of defending her conduct?* Wretched country! in which the name of friend is so frequently lavished with levity, without imposing any duty of defence of mutual interests, and which only furnishes more means of annoyance and injury, when once the unavailing title is discarded!

Opinion appears in every place which we frequent, and vanishes at the moment in which we endeavour to seize it. Every one says to me, that the world tells the most shameful falsehood about Delphine; and I cannot discover, whether the person who speaks to me, repeats these rumours, or spreads them about from his own invention. I always imagine myself to be surrounded by a crowd of scoffers who betray themselves by a careless glance, or smile, at the moment when they profess themselves concerned at my trouble. I never let slip the opportunity of mentioning the motives of gratitude which might have induced Delphine to afford an asylum to M. de Valorbe, as if it were necessary, in order to do a service to the unfortunate, to be influenced by any other consideration but their mis-

fortunes! In reality, I am inclined to believe that, in this city, it is more dangerous to practise virtue, than to abandon one's self to vice: they give no credit to generous sentiments, and they seek with as much earnestness to depreciate the motives of good actions, as they do to find apologies for the bad.

Alas! how much more comfortable is a life of obscurity, even unattended with those fulsome flatteries, the avant-couriers of hatred, and which she soon follows, in order to exact the price of her favours! For the first time, I now feel some consolation from being banished from the world by my personal defects.—But why do I speak of consolation? Delphine is unhappy, and what repose can I taste until she is defended and justified! I beseech you, my dear madam, in conjunction with M. de Lebensei, to determine what may be reasonably done, and to assist me with the united efforts of your judgments, and your friendship.

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## LETTER LXXXIV.

REPLY OF MADAME DE LEBENSEI TO MADEMOISELLE D'ALBEMAR.

Cernay, August 30, 1791.

THE emotion which I felt from your letter, Mademoiselle, has been the cause of the first letter dispute I have ever had with my Henry: after having read it, I exclaimed—"Alas! why am I deprived of any influence whatsoever? Proscribed as I am, I have no means left me to relieve my calumniated friends!" Scarce had I uttered these words, when a deep repentance, and a tender recollection of my friend presented itself to me, and I feared for some hours, that the impression would never be obliterated; but, at last, he pardoned me, because I was grievously in the wrong; and he might with the greatest ease have made me sensible of my error, were it not contrary to his nature to afflict me. He has set out for Paris, with the intention of serving Madame d'Albemar's cause; and what is necessary to be said in her defence, he will take care to have made public by other persons, as the prejudices of the world against the political opinions of M. de Lebensei are so violent, that it would be injurious to Madame d'Albemar, that he should appear as her most zealous admirer. Ah! how many resources of mischief does not malice possess! do not you feel the influence of the wicked like a painful burden on your heart? Do not they seem to hinder you from breathing? When once we desire to indulge a flattering prospect of hope, the recollection of their malice dissipates the pleasing image

from our hearts. A few hours after M. de Lebensei's departure, my child being well, I could no longer resist the desire which I felt, of conversing with you, and seeing Madame d'Albemar, and left Cernay rather late, as I did not return till midnight. You were not at home, but I saw Delphine, who had that moment received a letter from Leonce, in which he announced his return in a week, and in expressions the most tender and passionate to Madame d'Albemar; and still she seemed to me to be in profound melancholy. I am convinced that she knows what we wish to conceal but that her proud soul will not permit her to reveal it to us. Her door was shut to every one but Mademoiselle d'Artenas and myself. If she has seen Madame d'Artenas, she is informed of every thing! It is impossible for that woman to make a secret of any thing which it may be painful to disclose; she knows how to serve persons with advantage better than to treat them with delicacy. I inquired of Madame d'Albemar how she employed her time, during the absence of Leonce. "I give lessons to Isore," replied she, "and I walk about with her constantly, without seeing any visitors." On saying these words, she sighed, and our conversation ceased for a few minutes. "Will you not be very happy on Leonce's return?" said I.—"With his return!" said she rather hastily, "What will be the consequence of his return?" Then, after a short pause, she said to me: "I must request your pardon; I am both sick and sorrowful."—And then playing with Isore's pretty locks, she relapsed into a reverie. I was doubtful if I should continue to speak to her, but she seemed not to desire it, and I was fearful of being deceived respecting the cause of her defection, or of telling her more concerning the matter than she already knew.

I quitted her in sorrow, and she made no attempt to detain me; her deportment was not so affectionate as is usual with her; and as I know her disposition well, I am persuaded she is grievously afflicted with some cause of deep uneasiness. Whenever she is happy, she wishes to associate her friends in her happiness; but I have always remarked, that she is disposed to indulge her sorrow alone.

Alas! what mournful thoughts possessed my mind on my return home! You now see an instance that convinces you, that there is no resource for a woman from the troubles attending the unjust opinions of the world. Delphine, the independent Delphine, is herself a prey to this species of unhappiness, and nothing can prevail on her to disclose the cause of her uneasiness to us.

P. S. I had so far proceeded in my letter, when Leonce, whom we did not expect for eight days, came to the gate of Cernay House to ask for M. de Lebensei: as soon as he learnt that M. de Lebensei was not there, he set out on his return, in full speed, to Paris.

My servants learned from the footman who attended him, that he had left Madame de Mondeville and had suddenly departed in extraordinary haste. On arriving at Paris, he never stopped, but mounted a horse, and instantly proceeded hither.—My servants also told me, that he appeared much agitated, and that during the short time he spoke to them, his countenance changed two or three times. Doubtless he has discovered every thing; and knowing his sensibility for the reputation of Delphine, I shudder to think of the consequences. Ah! my dear! what will become of our friends? If M. de Lebensei sees Leonce, I shall hasten to inform you of what passes between them. Adieu, Mademoiselle; how much do I feel for your situation, and admire your perfect friendship for Madame d'Albemar!

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## LETTER LXXXV.

DELPHINE TO MONSIEUR DE LEBENSEI.

September 1<sup>a</sup>

I KNOW every thing my friends wished to conceal from me; I have either learned or conjectured all that has passed. The feeling I experience is painful: I had reflected on the injustice of the world, and assigned it to its sphere; I believed I might have been accused of imprudence, of weakness, of any error except those which would degrade me! I confess that I have, during the last fortnight, lived in a state of anxiety, of which it would have been painful for me to speak even to you. My spirit, however, ought to triumph over this chagrin, however tormenting it may be; but my heart is rent by a still more cruel anguish: I dread the impression which this affair may have made on the mind of Leonce. He arrived yesterday from Andely's, and has not yet visited me. I know he was at Cernay: did he find you there?—and what did he say to you?

Fear not, sir, to speak to me with the most perfect frankness. If I am reserved for the greatest of sufferings, if the affection of him I love be changed by the calumny of which I am the victim, I shall still oppose courage to this last misfortune. Advise me; I feel myself capable of any sacrifice: there are sorrows which give resolution, and those which afflict an elevated mind are of that number.



## LETTER LXXXVI.

LEONCE TO MONSIEUR DE LEBENSEI.

Paris, Sept. 1.

I HAVE always observed in you, sir, in the different relations which have existed between us, a vigorous and a prudent mind : I wish therefore to profit by your advice in a situation in which I am too much agitated to direct myself. One of my friends wrote to me at Andely's, that the reputation of Madame d'Albemar had been basely attacked ; and it is to my passion for her, to the numberless faults which that passion has made me commit, that I must attribute her misfortune and my own. I hoped to learn from you the name of the infamous wretch who has calumniated my friend, but I did not find you at home. I returned to Paris, where I had the additional mortification to learn, that an old man was the author of this shameful slander. You know him. I had offended him some months ago, and the mean wretch took vengeance on Madame d'Albemar.

After having loaded M. de Fierville with my contempt, I this morning obtained from him a thousand useless promises of disavowal, of secrecy and repentance ; but now, that the terrible tale which he forged has been circulated, the belief of it does not depend upon him. Shall I not discover another of the calumniators of Delphine ? Surely they are not all old men ? When I console myself with this idea, when it calms me for a moment, another soon arises to agitate my mind. Can I really be certain that I shall not compromise the character of Delphine, by offering to avenge her wrongs ? But must such calumnies be allowed to remain unpunished ? Would you advise me to take no notice of them ? Would you not hesitate, before you condemn me to such a punishment ? Madame d'Albemar is the relation of Madame de Mondeville ; she has no brother, no near relation to protect her. Is it then not my duty to supply that want ?

The reputation of Madame d'Albemar is doubtless the first interest to be considered ; but if it is not entirely evident to you, that duty requires me to allow the painful sentiments I feel to continue to prey secretly on my mind, you will not require such a sacrifice of me.

I have not yet seen Madame d'Albemar ; I cannot think of returning to her, until I have in some way repaired the affront she received, of which I am the first cause. Oh, I conjure you, if you know any means of attaining this object, explain it to me. Must I leave unprotected that innocence which has no other defender but me ?

## LETTER LXXXVII.

M. DE LEBENSEI'S ANSWER TO LEONCE.

Cernay, Sept. 2.

**THERE** is indeed, sir, one means of repairing all the misfortunes of your friend, but it is not that which your courage has suggested.—Madame d'Albemar has, like you, asked my advice. I have this moment replied to her, and stated all the ideas for your mutual happiness my friendship could inspire. I am just going to send off my letter, but I cannot without her consent inform you of its contents: she will, doubtless, communicate them to you.

At present, I can only say, that by following the dictates of the indignation you must naturally feel, you will at last irretrievably ruin Madame d'Albemar's reputation. If your name were not pronounced in this calumny, if your attachment for Madame d'Albemar were not the subject of general conversation and belief, you might act with some advantage, as her protector against her enemies. It would, besides, be necessary that M. de Fierville had a son, or near relation, who was willing to answer for him; that it might at once be evident why you addressed yourself to one man rather than another, in avenging the reputation of Madame d'Albemar; for the public always wishes to see a brave action founded on reasonable motives; and, when courage is marked by irregularity of conduct, it is always severely condemned, however heroic it may be: but, in your present situation, even though a younger man than M. de Fierville was known to be the author of the calumny against Madame d'Albemar, you would do an irreparable injury to your friend by taking upon yourself the right of avenging the affront she has received.

In society, we can with propriety only assume the defence of those its regulations require us to protect, such as a wife, a sister, a daughter, but never those who have no relation to us but that of love. Though you sir, are eminently distinguished by all those noble and energetic qualities, which can alone reflect a lustre on the objects of our affection, yet in vain would you attempt to defend the woman you love; that is a happiness which is denied you.

To none, however, is protection more necessary than to Madame d'Albemar: her conduct is perfectly pure, and yet appearances are such, that in the eyes of the world she may seem criminal. She possesses a superior mind, an excellent heart, a charming figure, youth, beauty, and fortune; but all these ad-

vantages serve only to procure her enemies, and render a natural protector more indispensable to her. That enlightened mind which gives independence to her opinions and her conduct, still more endangers her repose, since she has neither brother nor husband to serve as a security for her conduct in the eyes of others. Women destitute of these reports, generally shelter themselves under all the formalities which prevailing prejudices impose, as under a public guardianship instituted for their protection.

The generous character of Madame d'Albemar might be expected to render all those she has obliged, her friends; but she has already experienced much ingratitude, and has perhaps yet to suffer from more. You have seen what has happened with respect to Madame du Marset. In the societies of Paris, I have frequently remarked, that when men or women, whose characters do not rise above mediocrity, wish to relieve themselves from an importunate feeling of gratitude towards a superior mind, they select some duty easy to be performed by persons of their vulgar stamp, and make an ostentatious display of that example of their morality, in order to relieve themselves from the burden of every other. Madame d'Albemar possesses too great a mind to look for durable kindness from those who are not worthy of loving and admiring her; and it is by the authority of an imposing situation, rather than by her amiable qualities, that she must succeed in disarming hatred. I see her at present surrounded with perils, menaced with the severest afflictions, unless she is preserved from them by a man whom morality and the opinion of society will recognize as her proper defender.

Those who are dazzled with her charms and do not examine into her situation with the solicitude of friendship, will perhaps believe that she is capable of triumphing over every effort of malice. The triumph may be possible; but it would cost her so much pain, that her happiness would at least be greatly injured. I know not even if she can now of herself entirely efface the injury her enemies have done her: but I have said enough; I ought not to dwell on your misfortunes, until I know whether you will consent to adopt the remedy I propose. You know my opinions, sir, they are those of which I think I may be proud; and I have supported, if not with pleasure, at least with firmness, all the troubles in which they have involved me. These opinions have suggested the advice I have given to Madame d'Albemar; it is the only one which can save you from the evils you now experience, and those you have yet to fear: I believe it is worthy of your attention. You know, I hope, the esteem and the consideration I must always entertain for your talents and your virtues.

HENRY DE LEBENSEI.

## LETTER LXXXVIII.

M. DE LEBENSEI TO DELPHINE.

Cernay, Sept. 27, 1791.

He whom you love is ever worthy of you, madam, but neither his opinions nor yours can contend against the fatality of your destiny. There only remains one means of re-establishing your reputation, and of recovering the happiness you have lost. Collect, in attending to what I am now about to address to you, all the strength of your sensibility and your reason. Leonce is not irrevocably united to Matilda; Leonce may still be your husband; the law of divorce will be promulgated by the Constituent Assembly within a month. I have seen the law, and I am sure it will be speedily published. After having read these words, you will doubtless anticipate what is the subject on which I wish to reason with you; and the emotion, the uncertainty, feelings different and confused, will harass you to such a degree, that perhaps you will not be able to continue the perusal of my letter. Take it up a second time. I am unacquainted with Madame de Mondeville; her conduct towards my wife, has given me just grounds of offence; but still be assured, I shall guard myself from any prejudice which this might create. Your happiness is the only subject which occupies my thoughts; I know not what opinions you or your friend entertain, on the subject of divorce; I can easily persuade myself, that love would strongly induce you to approve of it: but still I know your reason and your feelings would reject happiness itself, if it did not accord with the ideas you had formed of real virtue. Those who condemn divorce, pretend that their opinion is founded on the most perfect morality: if this were the case, the wisest philosophers must have adopted it; for the first object of philosophers is to know what are our duties, in all their extent. But I wish to examine with you, whether the principles which dispose me to approve of divorce, are consistent with the nature of man, and with the beneficent views which it is our duty to ascribe to the Deity.

There is a great mystery in love. Perhaps it is a celestial gift bestowed on us by some angel on quitting the earth; perhaps it is a chimera of the imagination, which it pursues till the chilled heart is more allied to death than to life. No matter if I saw, in the feelings you indulge for Leonce, nothing but love, if I thought the character of his wife unsuitable to him, in every relation of life, I would not advise any steps to be taken to break asunder their ties. But listen to me attentively. In whatever manner human institutions are combined, few persons, of either sex, would willingly renounce the only happiness of existence; that intimate confidence, that simi-

larity of feelings and sentiments, that reciprocal esteem, and that endearing interest, which increases with every recollection. It is not for the delightful days with which nature has adorned the outset of our career, to prevent us from reflecting on futurity, it is not for these days that similarity of character is necessary; it is for that period of life when we seek, in the heart of another, the oblivion of that time which pursues us, that period when we are all abandoned by the world. The indissolubility of marriage, where there is the greatest disparity of characters betwixt the parties, prepares for old age miseries alleviated by no ray of hope. It seems only necessary to repress the desires of the young; but it is forgotten, that desires, thus repressed, will form the eternal regrets of the aged. Youth takes sufficient care of itself. There is no occasion for any anxiety about the employment or the pleasures of youth; but all institutions, all speculations, ought to have, for their object, the protection of advanced life; those declining years which the most unfeeling cannot behold without pity, or the most intrepid without dismay.

I am far from denying that divorce has its inconveniencies, or rather that its necessity arises from the imperfection of human nature. It is the province of moralists, it is the province of opinion to condemn those divorces whose motives cannot be excused but in the midst of a civilized society, which admits of marriages of conveniency, marriages which have no reference to futurity; where the laws can punish, neither the relations, who abuse their authority, nor the parties who are deficient in the duties they owe each other; the prohibition of divorce operates only as a punishment to the suffering party. It only rivets the chains of marriage, without extending any influence over the circumstances which render them cruel or delightful. The law seems to say, I cannot recover your happiness; but I can, at least, guarantee the duration of your sufferings. Certainly morality must advance to a high pitch of perfection, before we can meet with many husbands, who will willingly give themselves up to sufferings, without attempting to escape from them, in some manner or other; and if they do escape from them, if society shows indulgence to them, in proportion to the severity of the law, then all ideas of duty and of virtue are confounded; and, in civil as well as in political slavery, man lives liberated from the shackles which the laws impose.

It belongs to the peculiar circumstances of the parties to determine whether a divorce authorized by law, can be approved by the tribunal of public opinion, and receive the sanction of their own heart. A divorce which should be founded on any misfortune which had befallen one of the parties would be one of the vilest proceedings which could enter into the human imagination; for the precise object of the affections of the heart, and the ties of family, is to put us in possession of

friends who are independent of the successes and reverses of life, and thus to fix at least some limits to the power of fortune over our destiny. The English, that moral, religious, and free nation, have, in their marriage service, an expression which is very affecting: "*I take you,*" (the man and woman reciprocally pronounce) "*in health and in sickness, for better and for worse.*" Virtue, if at all necessary to make us share in adversity with those with whom we have shared in prosperity—virtue, in this case only requires of us a sympathetic ardour, so consonant to the inbred feelings of a generous nature, that it would be totally impossible to experience any other emotion. But the English who claim my admiration in almost every part of their civil, religious, and political institutions, have erred in not admitting divorce except in cases of adultery. The effect of this provision is to give independence to vice, and to hold virtue in bondage. It overlooks the strongest of all oppositions,—those which may result from a difference of character, sentiment, and principle.

Infidelity violates the nuptial vow; but the impossibility of reciprocal love, deprives life of the greatest happiness allotted to it in the destinations of nature: an impossibility really exists, when it is recognized by time, reflection, and even the judgment of our own friends and relatives. Who shall dare to pronounce that such a marriage is indissoluble? An inconsiderate promise, given at an age when the law does not permit us to determine upon the slightest circumstance of our external affairs, shall for ever decide the fate of a being whose years cannot be recalled, who must die—and die without having tasted the pleasures of love!

The Catholic religion is indeed the only system which consecrates the indissolubility of marriage; but it is because it is the spirit of that religion to inflict pain upon man, under a thousand different forms, as the most efficacious means of promoting his moral and religious improvement.

From the severities of self-mortification, to the tortures decreed by the Inquisition in the ages of barbarism, terror and suffering were the only instruments which that religion employed, to force mankind into the path of virtue. Nature, under the guidance of Providence, takes a course directly opposite: she conducts man to all that is good for his moral and physical existence, by the most attractive and the softest persuasions.

The Protestant religion, which approaches much nearer to the pure spirit of the Gospel than the Catholic, avails itself not of pain either to terrify or to fetter the powers of the understanding. Hence it happens, that in the Protestant countries of England, Holland, Switzerland and America, the manners are more pure, crimes less atrocious, and the laws more humane: whereas in Spain, Italy, all the countries in which Catholicism reigns in its utmost rigour, public institutions and

private manners partake of the erroneous principles of a religion, which regards constraint and misery as the most efficient means for the amelioration of man.

Nor is this all:—As this dominion of suffering is repugnant to the nature of man, he endeavours by a thousand ways to escape from its yoke. Hence it is, that the Catholic religion, if it has a few martyrs, makes so great a number of unbelievers. Atheism was openly professed in France before the revolution. Spinoza was an Italian. Almost all the systems of materialism have had their origin in Catholic countries; whilst in England, America, in a word, all the countries where the Protestant religion prevails, no one possesses that cheerless opinion. Atheism having, in those countries, no superstition to combat, would appear only as the destroyer of the most soothing hopes of an existence.

The Stoics, like the Catholics, were of opinion that man is rendered more virtuous by misfortune; but their system, purely philosophical, was infinitely less dangerous. Each individual, applying it to himself only, interpreted it according to his own inclination. It was not united with those religious superstitions which have neither limit nor object. It did not give a corporation of priests an incalculable ascendancy over the human species; for the imagination, though at first repugnant to sufferings, when it is once prepared to endure them, yields to them with an abject submission proportioned to the difficulty of the conquest; and it is much easier to govern men who have been induced to inflict on themselves the most cruel punishments, than those who have been left to the guidance of their natural sense, by impressing them only with the principles of reason and of happiness.

One of the benefits which flowed from the evangelical system of morality, was that of mitigating the rigorous principles of Stoicism. Christianity, beyond every other system, breathed a spirit of beneficence and humanity; yet, by the most singular interpretation, has it been converted into a new system of Stoicism, which subjects the understanding to the will of the priests, whereas the ancient system rendered it independent of all mankind; a Stoicism which makes the heart humble, while the other inspired it with a dignified pride; a Stoicism which wholly detaches you from the public interest, while the other devoted your life to your country; a Stoicism, in short, which employs pain for the purpose of subjugating the soul and understanding, while the other applied it, in order to invigorate all the powers of the mind, by the emancipation of our reason.

If these reflections, which I could extend much farther, were not your own understanding, madam, sufficient to supply them—if these reflections, I say, have convinced you, that he who would conduct mankind to virtue, by means of suffering, is regardless of divine goodness, and thwarts its expecta-

tions, you would agree with me in all the consequences which I wish to deduce from them.

Enumerate all the duties which virtue prescribes to us; our moral nature, nay more, the impulse of our corporeal system, every involuntary principle of action within us, urges us to the performance of those duties. Does it require an effort to attend to our parents, whose voice alone vibrates to all the remembrances of our life? If we could represent to ourselves a necessity which should compel us to abandon them, then it is that the soul would be doomed to the most painful torture! Does it require an effort to protect our children? Nature has decreed that the love which they inspire, should be more powerful than all the other passions of the heart. What greater cruelty could be inflicted, than the privation of this duty? Trace all the virtues, magnanimity, candour, pity, humanity—what laborious, what fruitless violence, would be offered to one's own disposition, in order to obtain, in direct repugnance to his nature, his conscious approbation of an act of uneasiness, meanness and cruelty! Whence proceeds this sublime harmony between our being and our duties? From the same Providence which attracts us by a sensation of pleasure towards every thing which is necessary for our preservation. What! that the Deity who has arranged every thing in the most easy and agreeable manner, for the support of physical existence, should have placed our moral nature in opposition to virtue? That the reward of virtue should be promised to us in an unknown world; but that in the present, of which we feel the real burdens, we must incessantly repress the ever-reviving aspirations of the soul after happiness!—that we should repress this sensation, which is so delightful in its own nature, when not unjustly attempted to be subdued!

Of what fantastic irregularities are not men capable? Their Creator had implanted sympathy in their bosoms as a preservative from cruelty; fanaticism has made them disregard this instinct of the soul, by persuading them that the being from whom this endowment of their nature sprung, has commanded them to suppress it. All men are animated with an ardent desire of happiness; this desire has been represented by hypocrites as the temptation of guilt. Thus have they committed blasphemy against God; for the desire of happiness pervades every part of the creation. Doubtless this principle, like all others, is liable to the abuse of being carried beyond its proper limits. There are circumstances in which sacrifices become necessary. Of this kind are all those, in which the happiness of others requires that you should sacrifice your own interest to theirs; but still it is with the view of effecting the greatest possible sum of general felicity, that a few individuals must become the victims of suffering; and the means which nature employs in the moral as well as the physical world, are the enjoyments of life.

If these principles are founded in truth, can it be supposed that Providence requires of men to support the bitterest of all



afflictions, in dooming them to inseparable union with an object which renders them profoundly miserable? Could such a punishment be enjoined by supreme goodness? And could it be exacted by divine mercy, as an expiation of error?

God has said, "*It is not good that man should be alone.*" His beneficent intention could not be fulfilled, if there were no means of separation from an insensible, stupid, perhaps criminal woman, who could never enter into your feelings nor sentiments! How absurd must he have been, who dare to pronounce that there existed any ties which despair could not burst asunder! Death comes to relieve us from bodily sufferings when our strength is no longer able to bear them; and yet the institutions of society would make this life a Hoglin's prison which has no outlet!

The principal objection which can be made against divorce, is wholly inapplicable to the situation of M. de Mondeville, since he has no children. I shall not, therefore, repeat all that might be urged in removal of that difficulty. Nevertheless I will observe to you, that those moralists who, in their writings against divorce, have argued from the interest of the children, have totally forgotten, that, if the possibility of divorce be a happiness for men, it is also a happiness for children, who will become men in their turn. Children are generally regarded as if they were always to remain such: but the present children are the future spouses; and you would sacrifice the remainder of their life to their infancy, by depriving, on their account, mature age of a right which might, perhaps, one day, save themselves from the horrors of despair.

In addressing a person of your vigorous intellect, it was incumbent upon me to discuss the opinion which interests you in a general point of view. But how much stronger will my reasoning appear, if we consider only your particular situation! Leonce was anxious to be united to you. It is but by an artifice that he is the spouse of Mademoiselle de Vernon. You have not been able to renounce your affection for each other. You pass your life together. Leonce loves you only, exists for you only. His wife is perhaps still ignorant of your attachment, but she must soon discover it. Your generous conduct towards M. de Valorbe, was the first cause of the abominable injustice which you have suffered; but it was impossible, that sooner or later your attachment to Leonce should not have injured you in the public opinion. By a lucky chance which should claim your blessing, you live in one of those epochs when power despises not the aid of knowledge. In a month the law of divorce will have passed; and Leonce, in becoming your husband, will honour you by his love instead of exposing you to the ruin of your reputation. Do you fear the displeasure of the world? You have seen my wife supported, perhaps, with some difficulty; but I will assure you that this displeasure will daily decrease. The system of manners will become more austere; marriage will be more highly respected; and it will

be felt—that all these advantages have arisen from the possibility of conjoining happiness with duty.

It cannot be denied, that divorce, appearing to some as the result of a revolution which they detest, excites their disapprobation more in this, than in any other point of view; and as political animosities are more readily directed against a man than a woman, it may happen that Leonce would expose himself to a greater severity of censure than you, in adopting a resolution, which the spirit of party would condemn: but if a sort of intrepid reason be necessary to women, in order to induce them to become the objects of public opinion; a man of sensibility should feel no hesitation in taking measures to secure the reputation and happiness of her whom his love may have exposed to danger.

I am aware that M. de Mondeville has been educated in a country, where the highest importance is attached to ancient opinions, as well as ancient usages; but he is too enlightened, not to perceive that the illusions which inspired the sublime virtues in former times, have not now sufficient power to reproduce them. Uncertain remembrances cannot serve as a steady rule of conduct, and the civil and political virtues must be founded on a basis which is more conformable to the principles of knowledge and reason. In short, I have not the least doubt, that it will only be necessary to inform M. de Mondeville of the possibility of divorce, to make him embrace with transport so fair a prospect of happiness. It would be unworthy of him to sacrifice your reputation to his love, and to be attentive only to the preservation of his own. — It would be unworthy of him to emancipate himself, as he does, from the yoke of matrimony, and not to consent to break it by a judicial decision! Would he acknowledge, that his passion for you is stronger than his duty, but that it would bend to the frivolous censures of society? But I will stop short, such a supposition is impossible.

I have always thought that no man can be secure of his own happiness, or that of the woman whom he loves, without disdaining or subjugating opinion. M. de Mondeville is, of all characters, the most decisive, the most ardent, the most energetic; and could it be, that he should be dependent on the judgment of others, while he seems, more than any are, calculated to gain an ascendancy over every mind? No! I cannot think so; and upon yourself alone will undoubtedly depend the decision of your destiny.

You excite, madam, so tender and profound an interest; you have conducted yourself with such perfect generosity, towards my wife and me, that I should devote many years of my life to inspire you with the courage to be happy. Heaven, love, friendship, all the generous influences will, I hope, aid the prayers which I offer up for you,

HENRY DE LEBENSEI.

## LETTER LXXXIX.

ANSWER OF DELPHINE TO M. DE LEBENSEI.

Paris, Sept. 3.

Ah! what mischief have you done me! You have written from the inspiration of friendship, but is it necessary to renew the griefs of an irreparable misfortune? Yes! it is, and I should be unworthy of your esteem, if I for a moment entertained the hope which you have conceived in my favour. You love not Matilda; you have even good grounds of complaint against her. It was natural, therefore, that you should deceive yourself, as to the duties which Leonce and I have to perform towards her. This allusion could not have happened to me; I have never admitted, for a single instant, but there are words which overwhelm the soul, even though not productive of any effect. When I read in your letter, as if through a cloud, these expressions—*Leonce is not irrevocably united to Matilda, he may still become your husband*—I shuddered; I felt an indefinite sensation, beyond the bounds of ordinary existence. It is impossible for me, at present, to recall any idea of this impression. If the soul, wound up to ecstasy, should obtain a glimpse of the destiny of the happy, and should, a moment after, have its attention again driven downwards to the troubles of life; how could it express all that it had felt? Such is the confusion I now experience. I felt at my heart, as I read your first lines, a sensation which I shall never recover. It is past! but the recollection of it imbitters the sorrows of real existence.

I hasten to answer without having seen Leonce. I wish him to remain, for ever, ignorant of the proposition which you have made to me; his consent or his refusal would be equally painful to me. I know that my situation is hopeless; all that you have said to me is true; and I am menaced with sufferings with which you are well acquainted. Should Matilda discover those sentiments which chance has hitherto concealed from her, I will sacrifice my happiness to Matilda, after having sacrificed my reputation to Leonce. Every thing, alas! proves to me, that there is no possible happiness for lovers, out of the married state; no tranquillity for that weakness which, still retaining its virtue, wishes to enter into a compromise with love. But this painful conviction cannot induce me to adopt your advice. It would be criminal in me to follow it. Condescend to hear me; I am far from intending to offend you.

Think not that my understanding rejects what the most sage philosophy has dictated to you. I think, it is true, that, except in circumstances similar to those in which Madame de Lebensei was placed, the delicacy of a female must inspire her with considerable repugnance to divorce. But I have no

faith in irrevocable vows; they are, in my opinion, nothing more than errors of human reason, sanctioned by the ignorance or despotism of legislators. But, were I capable of exciting Leonce to divorce Matilda, were I to regard that idea as an eventual, a possible chance, I should disavow the principle which has always regulated my moral conduct. I should sacrifice the legitimate happiness of another to my own; in a word, I should do what would appear to me deserving of condemnation and she who sets her own conscience at defiance is always criminal. Repentance is never unforeseen; remorse makes itself felt at a distance; and she who can examine her own heart, knows before guilt takes place all that she must feel after it is committed.

A divorce would plunge Matilda into the deepest despair. She would regard it as a crime, she would never look upon herself as disengaged, and would confine herself for the remainder of her days, in a cloister. I do not positively know what degree of pain she might feel, if she became acquainted with Leonce's attachment for me. But what I cannot doubt is, that she would be for ever miserable, should Leonce profiting by the law of divorce, adopt a proceeding which would, in her sight, amount to an impious sacrilege. When my censurable and unfortunate friend, Madame de Vernon, deceived Leonce in order to unite him to her daughter, Matilda was ignorant of the fraud: she would not have consented to it; she has evinced sincerity in every part of her conduct; she is not a very amiable, but she is a virtuous character. She is tormented neither by her imagination, nor her sensibility; she observes the conduct of her husband, neither with anxiety of mind nor of heart; but she would sustain an incurable wound, if attached in those ideas in which she has entrenched herself—if her pride and her religion were offended at the same moment.

To attain the happiness of being the wife of Leonce, I know not that pain which would not seem a pleasure to my feelings! In the sincerity of my heart, I confess to you, that I would, with transport, accept three months of this happiness and death. But I ask of your own noble and generous soul, whether you would have espoused your Eliza, at the expense of the happiness of another? Would you even accept of supreme happiness, at such a price? Whither could we fly, to avoid the regret of the pain which would be thus inflicted? Do you know a feeling which preys upon the heart with such agonizing bitterness! Love, which supersedes every other consideration, duties, fears, oaths—love itself adds new force to pity. They are twin-born sentiments, of which the one can never triumph over the other. The ambitious man easily forgets the vexations which he has felt, in order to attain the object of his pursuit. But the happiness of love so disposes the heart to sympathy, that, towards its completion, it is impossible to remain callous to the presence or the recollection of pain. There are many errors which may be retrieved. Virtue is innate in

the human heart; it re-appears after long intervals of absence, like the returning vigour of convalescence; but the moment pity is extinguished we have slain our good genius, and all the instincts of the heart are for ever silent.

Yes! I would banish far from my thoughts that happiness which was once promised me, under the auspices of innocence and of virtue, but which nothing henceforth can restore to me. I ought to go farther: I ought no longer to see Leonee; but I cannot conceal it from myself; my disposition does not possess sufficient energy for sacrifices. I perform those duties which, from the natural qualities of the heart, are easily practicable; but am very little capable of those which require a grand effort. Perhaps, in your system, which makes happiness the source and end of all the virtues—perhaps you have not sufficiently reflected upon those combinations of destiny which enjoin self-subjugation. I feel that I am this instant in one of those afflicting situations, and I know what is wanting to me, in order to enable me to follow the strict path of my duty.

It is not true, as your heart delights to imagine, that it requires no effort to be virtuous. Happiness, I admit with you, must be regarded as the ultimate end of Providence; but morality, which is the command given to mankind to fulfil the intentions of God upon earth, frequently requires that private should be sacrificed to public happiness. From me, you may estimate the sufferings which must be endured in discharging the whole extent of our duties. I presume to think myself possessed of those virtues which are the result of a good disposition; but I do not reach those which cannot be exercised without effecting a triumph over the affections of the heart. I do not pretend to deny that I occupy an inferior rank among the upright; the virtues which consist in sacrifices are perhaps more deserving in esteem, than the most benevolent emotions.

In this instance, at least, I shall feel no hesitation as to the path of duty. Opinion may select me as the object of persecution; calamity of every description may be heaped on my devoted head; I cannot, at this time, withdraw myself from their reach, not even by renouncing the society of Leonee; but still less am I disposed to escape them by breaking in upon the destiny of Matilda. Let my errors prove destructive of my own happiness, but never disturb the peace of others! and may the unfortunate Delphine, the sole victim of her love, never draw forth other tears than her own!

In rejecting the advice which your friendship has dictated, I am not the less deeply sensible of my obligations to you, sir, for the solicitude with which you have interested yourself in my happiness: and it is a remembrance which I feel as a pleasure in superadding to all those which attach me for life to you and your Eliza.

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